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Forum: "IS MARVEL BETTER THAN DC?

CLAREMONT'S HEROINES

HOW A COMIC IS PRODUCED

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Artist of the "Other-Ground"

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FANDOM'S FORUM

MARVEL IS STILL BEST

By Don and Maggie Thompson

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"***DC's*** superheroes are better than ***Marvel's***," said a friend to us recently. He wasn't talking about how good ***DC's*** stories are. He wasn't saying that ***DC's*** art is better than that of other companies. He was talking about the quintessential **nature** of ***DC's*** characters.

What, after all, is a more basic comic-book concept than the **Bat Man** — a rich playboy who adopts black, concealing garb to terrify criminals at night in his fight against crime?

What is more basic comic-book concept than **Superman** — an alien being on Earth, adopting a secret identity to conceal his more-than-human powers?

What is a more basic comic-book concept than **Wonder Woman** — a fantasy-woman given powers at her super-natural creation?

Surely, comics creations from other publishers could at best be mere shadows of these. Year after year brings us more and more imitations of the originals.

OK, our friend may have a point there, we thought. We tried to come up with a list of the basic superhero types and found eight:

(1) **The Better-Because-He's-Alien Hero.** He or she comes to us from another planet or time or race and has abilities in addition to ours. (These types never seem to have abilities noticeably **fewer** than ours; they may have an allergy to Kryptonite or fire, but they can see and hear and taste and smell and seem to be bipedal and so on. They always have such bonus abilities as jumping over tall buildings or whatever is handy.) **Superman** is more powerful than a locomotive; **J'onn J'onnz** can become invisible; **Sub-Mariner** is superstrong and can live underwater.

(2) **The Oops!-He's-a-Superhero Hero.** This character accidentally gains super powers — often, though not invariably, in imitation of another member of the animal kingdom. **Spider-Man** is bitten by a radioactive spider; **Plastic Man** fans in a vat of chemicals; the **Whizzer** is given a transfusion of mongoose blood. What in the real world would be speedily fatal instead pops a comic-book character into the crime-fighting biz.

(3) **The Congratulations-You're-a-Hero Hero.** A worthy person is appointed to receive abilities. Billy Batson receives his powers from **Shazam; Green Lantern** is awarded a ring and lantern.

(4) **The Painstakingly Invented Hero.** Someone works tirelessly at the drawing board to produce this one. The original **Human Torch** is an android designed by a scientist; **Iron Man** invents himself; **Nick Fury's** weapons are provided by **S.H.I.E.L.D.**

(5) **The Clap-If-You-Belive-in-Fairies Hero.** He or she is a hero because of plain old magic. He may be a god of mythology (**Thor** or **Mercury**), an enchanted hero (***Fawcett's*** **Captain Marvel**), or simply a magical scholar (**Doctor Strange**).

(6) **The Cap-and-Gown Hero.** He studies and sweats and strains and **learns** to become a superhero. This may be the least believeable category, simply because it's the **most** possible in our world — where it doesn't happen. **The Spirit, *Harvey's* Black Cat,** the **Bat Man, Crimebuster,** and ***Comic House's*** **Daredevil** all worked like crazy to win their figurative diplomas in crimefighting.

(7) **The Oh-Yuk!-It's-a-Hero Hero:** The monster who turns out to be a hero is at least as old as Beauty and the

Beast. Some are intelligent — others are little more than animated garbage piles. There are a couple who are simply handicapped types who overcame those handicaps — **Dr. Mid-Nite** and **Rackman** — and probably wouldn't go in this list, if we didn't want to make our categories as broad as possible. **Swamp Thing, the Heap, the Golem,** and **It the Living Colossus** belong in this category, though — as do some about which the less said the better, definitely including **Skywald's Heap.** (Note: Some of those characters vacillate in their attitudes and become more or less heroic as the story demands. **Hillman's Heap** begins life (if such it can be called) as a menace but eventually acts as a force used by Nature to restore goodness and balance to the world.)

(8) **The Walking Dead Hero.** This may be the sickest category of all (though it can result in some good stories). The hero is dead, and his death makes him a superhero. (The precedent for **this** one certainly antedates ***DC.***) **The Spectre, Kid Eternity,** and **Zombie,** and **Deadman** return from beyond the grave to collar crooks.

ZOR IS ABOUT TO TAKE THE LIFE OF AN INNOCENT GIRL! CAN YOU HELP ME SAVE HER?
WE CAN DO NOTHING BUT SUGGEST THAT ALL EVIL HAS AN INSTINCTIVE AVERSION TO ECTOBANE!
WHAT IS IT, JIM CORRIGAN?
ECTOBANE! WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT BEFORE?
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Now, mind you, some very successful superheroes are combination sandwiches. **Doctor Strange** trains until he is awarded additional magical powers; **Billy Batson** is awarded magical power for his merits. **Bat Man** invents his crime-fighting paraphernalia. ***Marvel's*** **Daredevil** more than overcomes his handicap of blindness when he is accidentally struck by a radioactive object — and is trained in the use of his powers.

On the other hand, we've ignored subdivisions within types. You could, for example, come up with a group from the Clap-If-You-Belive-in-Fairies types that you might call the Speak-up-You're-a-Hero Heroes. These people say a magic word and their powers go into action. Remember the **Captain Marvel** version from 1966 who says, "Split!" and whose body then flies into bits? (Not something most of us would consider an advantage.) All the members of the Marvel Family (not to mention **Marvel Bunny**) gets powers by calling on a name. (That includes the one superhero who couldn't say his own name, **Captain Marvel Jr.,** who calls out the name of his hero, Captain Marvel, in order to change form.) Possibly derived from the religious tradition of sacred words of great power, there are several such heroes in comics, including **Kid Eternity, Johnny Quick,** and **Johnny Thunder.** Even poor old **Dynamo** tried it once, though on a pseudo-scientific basis involving his Thunder Belt rather than the fantasy involved with most other characters.

All right, we've come up with eight basic super types. How do ***DC's*** biggest characters stack up to the list?

We've already suggested that **Superman** is the very basic alien, that **Bat Man** is the very basic crimefighter-by-night, that **Wonder Woman** is a quintessential fantasy figure, and that **Green Lantern's** winning of his powerful tools fits the standard.

But does this make ***DC's*** giants the truly basic figures that inspire only limitation from other companies, as our friend implied?

First, we speculate a bit as to the **originality** of even these concepts.

Philip Wylie was paid for the inspiration his ***Gladiator*** provided the creators of **Superman** (though Wylie's character did not come from another planet). This hardly smacks of a character who sprang unique and whole into the realm of the superhero.

If **Bat Man** is the first rich playboy who affects a black cape, skulking in alleys, and fighting crime at night, striking fear into the hearts of common criminals, what is the **Shadow**? If **Aquaman** is the first fish-man who lives in the ocean and has super powers among humans, what is the **Sub-Mariner**? If **Swamp Thing** is the original dying-man-in-a-swamp-turned-into-a-shambling-monster, then what is **Hillman's Heap**? (Or, taking things a step further back, what is **Theodore Sturgeon's "It"**?)

EVERYTHING DISAPPEARS BEFORE THE AMAZING AMAZON AS SHE IS THRUST BACKWARD... BACKWARD THROUGH THE MISTS OF TIME...
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Even if you try to limit comic-book superheroes' antecedents to comics, you'll find **Superman's** feat preceded by **Popeye's**, as Bill Blackbeard detailed in his chapter of ***All in Color for a Dime.***

But —

But —

DC does seem to have the basic characters, the ones that last for decades. ***Marvel's*** characters are imitative and unimpressive in concept, for the most part — derived from the models of **Bat Man** and **Superman** and **Wonder Woman**, the mighty figures which survived the lean years of comics. **Original** superheroes have been hard to come by. (**Deadman** and **NoMan** are the only ones to spring to our minds from comic pages in recent years.)

But —

But —

But it's what is **done** with a concept, not the concept itself, that makes a comic book worth buying, isn't it?

Look at **Spider-Man**. The concept was old hat, even in 1962, when a radioactive arachnid propelled a bookish, lonely teen-ager into a career filled with even more hang-ups than he already had. Characters with the abilities of another form of animal were most usually limited to one-shot villains, but spiders and flies and penguins and cats and birds and killer moths always seem to be used as source material for characters looking for inspiration.

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But **Spider-Man's** execution of the old ideas is different. There is more to it than, say, the idea that a character — realizing that cockroaches can fit into small places, can live on little food, have tremendous endurance, can fly, and move with great speed — adopts the guise of Roach-Woman. **Spider-Man's** concept includes within it the character conflicts and plot approaches that give it longevity and continuing interest. **Peter Parker** is as carefully chosen and set in a real-world milieu as **Spider-Man** is.

It's in the production of memorable concepts **memorably executed** that we find ***DC's*** production lacking. There are conflicts and possibilities to the concept of **Bat Man**, too — but they were almost never explored in the early decades of that character's life. In fact, in recent years it has been those very unexplored facets that have made the character fascinating to a new generation of creators, who occasionally infuse newer stories with a feeling of what the character should have been involved with since his inception. Compare another version of the concept of a non-super-powered detective, whose enemies know his costume by sight and fear it, whose methods combine friendship with the police with operation outside the law. Compare **Bat Man** with the **Spirit**, a vastly superior strip.

Artistic success has little to do with the quintessential nature of a character and possibly little to do with sales figures. If a character is basic enough, its creators may fear to try anything different with it, and the adventures may soon become predictible and dull. Why is it that the stories we remember most from **Superman's** years are those which turned his run-of-the-mill tales on their ear? The **first** Bizarro story, the **first** Lor Lemaris story — Those were memorable. Don remembers the first Kryptonite story (done on radio — and you should have heard the kids talking about the story in which **something** — no one knew what — made **Superman**, the invincible **Superman**, collapse). But every time ***DC*** introduces the sprout of a new concept, the company squeezes the sap from it and continues to use the dry, lifeless husk forever.

Nothing like a respectable percentage of the appearances of ***DC's*** output — of the reams and reams and reams of four-color magazines — is memorable in the slightest.

Marvel's characters may be imitative in concept (take a clutch of teen-agers with one super-power each, give them a telepathic mentor, and train them to battle evil mutants), but what ***Marvel*** does with the concept can be compelling.

Maybe we're wrong.

Maybe all it takes to get a memorable, big-selling comic book is a quintessential hero. As long as the particular basic hasn't been tackled before, maybe that's all it takes.

But we've just said that all the basics have been tried already, and most of the basics live at ***DC***, at that.

Well, we just may have come up with something.

We can't reveal all the details, of course. But we're working on a great new concept:

What would you think of a character who comes to Earth by spaceship from Betelgeuse (where everyone can read minds) and lands in Tibet, where a lama awards him a magic ring after training him for years in the art of necromancy, just before a bite from a radioactive rabid dogs kills our hero, who is enabled by his training to return from the dead to fight crime. (His main weakness in doing so is that every so often he becomes rabid and bites people.)

How's **that** for a basic concept? It's the concept of taking all the other basic concepts and jamming them into one, single one.

How can the comics companies pass this one up?

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CHRIS CLAREMONT'S HEROINES

Brian Nelson

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In film criticism the term, "auteur," is used to refer to those directors who repeatedly examine certain plot motifs or themes in the body of their work. Hitchcock's explorations of the nature of guilt and suspicion, or Truffaut's studies of the ambiguities of love are examples springing readily to mind. Certain comics writers and artists may also be described as auteurs: Jim Starlin with his recurring portraits of death on the cosmic scale; Roy Thomas, who consistently pairs his chivalric "barbarians" with more liberated women; and Chris Claremont, whose characterizations of independent, courageous women have helped win him a considerable fan following.

Yet merely to identify the recurrent themes of a comics auteur is too simple. To achieve a deeper insight into the concerns of a creator, one must examine the ways in which those recurrent themes are developed and modified. For example, the power and independence of many Claremont-scripted heroines, such as **Colleen Wing, Satana, Ms. Marvel,** the **Black Widow, Jean Grey,** and **Stor,** is easily noted. Yet how is that power and independence defined? The methods Claremont employs to showcase his heroines' fiber reveal both new sides of the characters and of the author himself.

Ms. Marvel, one of the first heroines to come under Claremont's aegis, was a character posing immediate problems to any new scripter. Given the powers, the costume, and the name of the Kree superhero, **Capt. Marvel, Ms. Marvel** needed immediate characterization to prevent her from becoming another female clone in the manner of **Supergirl, Batgirl,** etc. Claremont responded by establishing as many details for Carol Danvers' private life as possible: friends, family, work problems (most of which represent loose plot ends now that the book has been cancelled). More significantly, he consolidated the personalities of Carol Danvers and **Ms. Marvel** (at first, they had been two separate entities sharing the same form).

The moment when these women realize their shared identity is a prototype for many Claremont heroines. "Memories! My memories! It — they're a past to go with my present — and it's so — beautiful! I'm — I'm not just **Ms. Marvel**, I'm Carol Danvers, as well. Two halves of the same person finally merging into a complete whole. After all these months of searching, of agony — I know who I am!!" The definition of self is integral to the advent of any Claremont heroine; for other examples, see the remarks **Phoenix** delivers upon her first appearance ("No longer am I the woman you knew! I am fire! And life incarnate!"), or the title of one of Claremont's earliest **Spider-Woman** stories, "Who Am I?"

Subsequent **Ms. Marvel** stories enabled Claremont to transfer his heroine's powers from her costume to the woman herself. There is an implicit message that for Carol to be a truly liberated heroine (as the name **Ms. Marvel** practically forced her to be), she could not be dependent upon hand-me-down powers. She must be her own woman.

That sense of independence and indomitable self-will was most strongly demonstrated in ***MS. MARVEL #7***, where **Ms. Marvel** was brainwashed by Modok, the mega-acephalic 'head' of AIM. Modok employs a device called the "mind-ripper" on Carol, which makes her obedient to Modok's every command . . . until he asks her to kill, at which point her stronger code asserts itself and she defies Modok's programming.

The name of this weapon, the "mind-ripper," is perfectly conceived because it so viscerally describes the process to which Claremont subjects so many of his heroines. Indeed, he might even be accused of misogyny were it not that he uses mind-ripping techniques to show consistently how his heroines may rise above the torture and brainwashings.

Colleen Wing provides one early example. Kidnapped by the forces of Master Khan, she is conditioned by Angar the Screamer to the point where she is "a woman finally, irrevocably broken . . . a woman who can no longer call her mind, her body, her . . . soul . . . her own . . . a woman damned." (***IRON FIST #5***, pg. 30) Indoctrinated to attack **Iron Fist,** her programming is broken only when **Iron Fist** uses his quasi-mystical powers to merge minds with her. Colleen gets her own mind back, and takes a terrible vengeance on Angar, running her samurai blade through his gut with clear premeditation.

Colleen has been metaphysically raped, both in her captivity and in her rescue. The mental anguish that Angar subjects her to is clear enough, but in breaking Angar's hold on her, **Iron Fist** must perform an equally mind-ripping feat. ***IRON FIST #6*** describes it as "all the myriad, private things that make up two people's totality — all crash-banged together. An instant of agony, of ecstasy, of sharing." It restores her mind, but it's not really a heroic action. In ***IRON FIST #7***, Colleen tells Iron Fist, "... because of the mind-meld — 'meld,' that's a laugh! I'd use another word for it. And I could kill you for what you did to me."

Yet Colleen has taken revenge for her humiliation at Angar's hands, and so she rests content — until the next time. IN ***DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU #32-33***, a crime syndicate addicts her to heroin in order to make a white slave of her. This time, Claremont allows her to escape the mental and physical bondage herself, as she meditates herself free of the addiction. But this time, her retribution against her captor is even more striking — another sword through the gut, but without the blunting effect of Comics Code censorship. This villain won't come back again.

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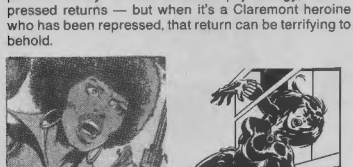
Tigra the Were-woman undergoes a similar fate at Claremont's hands. In ***MARVEL TEAM-UP #67***, **Kraven** utilizes a "mnemonic scrambler" (read: mind-ripper) on **Tigra**, turning her docile or ferocious upon his command. The scrambler, shaped like a pet collar, reinforces the nature of Kraven's hold on Tigra. Kraven would regard her as something to stroke, to order about, to handle as a pet. Again, the point is to contrast Kraven's desire to own a woman's soul with the actual soul of that woman, which refuses to be owned. **Kraven:** "You were mine body and soul a moment ago — you will be so again." **Tigra:** "I'll tear your hear out first."

Yet **Ms. Marvel, Colleen,** and **Tigra** are all merely brainwashed. A fearsome as their torments seem, they don't compare to what Claremont sets up for another heroine given over to his jurisdiction. In an awesome story entitled **"The Damnation Waltz,"** (***MARVEL PREVIEW #7***), **Satana**, the Devil's Daughter, runs afoul of opponents who take her personality and entomb it, burying it within the personality and body of a makeshift persona.

Judith Camber is a housewife, meek and complacent. She has no idea that when she comes home to find her family slaughtered it's a tragic side-effect of the psychic struggles of Satana, within her subconscious and grappling for escape. Unknown to her, when she sees **Satana's** face reflected in a coffeepot, it's the face of the woman she once was. She has no idea that Judith Camber doesn't really exist, that Judith Camber is a construct-identity created by **Satana's** enemies, a psychic cage for the devil's daughter.

This is going far beyond mere brainwashing. **Satana** has imposed upon her an entirely different personality, one designed to reduce her from her bold, indomitable self to a woman easily controlled, a woman who is manageable and knows "her place." Despite its horror story vestments, **"The Damnation Waltz"** functions as a parable of the emerging, liberated woman, and the dire consequences in store for those who would try to repress her and remake her into a more traditionally feminine woman.

Make no mistake about it, those consequences are dire. The Basilisk, a demon at **Satana's** command, emerges at the tale's climax to give **Satana's** tormentors a full taste of Armageddon. The Basilisk's appearance is eerily striking (veiled in shadows yet given a full-page spread as he savages the villains), and recalls the awesome vengeance of **Colleen Wing**, or for that matter, the elemental fury of the **X-Men's Storm**, in ***X-MEN #147***. In that tale, **Dr. Doom** has transformed **Storm** into a living statue for his galleries, but **Storm's** subconscious rebels and whips weather conditions for miles around to the point of frenzy. True to Freudian psychology, the repressed returns — but when it's a Claremont heroine who has been repressed, that return can be terrifying to behold.



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It is worth noting at this point that the mind-ripping scenario is one Claremont has reserved almost exclusively for women. Heroes such as **Spider-Man** and **Cyclops** have undergone a psychic scarring at the hands of his villain, **D'Spayre**, but never brainwashing. **Spider-Man's** mind was taken over in ***MARVEL TEAM-UP #100***, but the emphasis was not on his reaction to that invasion, but rather on the woman Karma, and her reactions to being suddenly in control of a much stronger body. The one male who has undergone mental programming in a Claremont story is **Colossus**, when the **X-Men's** foe, **Arcade**, transformed **Colossus** into the **Proletarian**, a kind of super-propagandist. Even in this story, however, relatively little time is spent on **Colossus'** reactions to the mind-ripping.

Why? I suspect it is because male heroes, simply by virtue of being male, fit quite naturally into our perception of what a hero should be like. Heroines, on the other hand, have always had to break the perceptions that they should be either deferent and feminine, or mannish and overpowering, in order to fit into the male heroic world. (Margaret O'Connel's fine articles on the lot of heroines give ample testimony to this.) Yet Claremont had set himself the task of improving the heroine's lot (see the lettercol of ***MS. MARVEL #4***, and notice that all Claremont's examples of three-dimensional heroines are characters he scripted), and in order to accomplish that task, he found the need for scenarios that would truly test the mettle of his heroines, and prove them worthy to the strongest of tests. Hence, the mind-ripping plot, which neatly dovetails with the drama being played out in society at this moment, as liberated women fight to shake off the persona of "femininity" and domestication that the old guard would impose upon them.

An especially vivid example is found in ***MARVEL TEAM-UP #82-85***, an espionage epic starring the **Black Widow**, **Spider-Man**, and **Nick Fury**. Here, the story follows the same pattern as "**The Damnation Waltz**." Nancy Rushman, a shy, quiet kindergarten teacher, cannot explain how she reacts like Bruce Lee whenever threatened with danger. Everyone calls her the **Black Widow**, much to her bafflement; the life of a spy frightens her. Yet in the clinch, she instinctively resorts to combat styles that only a master spy such as the **Black Widow** would know. When she tries on the **Black Widow's** costume, at **Spider-Man's** urging, she is amazed at how well it fits, and disturbed by the strange memories the costume seems to evoke for her (so, too, did Judith Camber react when modelling **Satana's** garb in "**The Damnation Waltz**").

Eventually it is revealed that the **Black Widow** was tortured, and that, "too protect itself, her mind retreated into a shell, taking refuge behind a persona that was the antithesis of the **Black Widow** — an unassuming, all-American school teacher, Nancy Rushman." (***MTU #87, pg.16***) Again, the mind-ripping has had repressive effects on the mind of a Claremont heroine. Again, the struggle is between the meek, shy personality operating on the conscious level, and the dynamic, bold heroine submerged in her own mind and struggling to get out.

One difference here, though, is that Nancy Rushman is the Widow's own creation, a side of her personality that she manifests in self-defense. In ways that she hardly dares contemplate, Nancy Rushman is attractive to the Widow; as she muses in the same issue quoted above, "... without Spider-Man's efforts, I might have stayed in that 'safe' character forever. I wonder, would that have been so tragic a fate?"

This tension with the **Black Widow**, as she feels herself torn between the heroine she knows she is and the quiet lass she knows she could have been, is what makes this study of heroism perhaps Claremont's most successful. No didactic point is proven here about the fate that befalls the mind-rippers (although **Viper**, the villainess behind the whole scheme is finally hurled "into oblivion."). Rather, the threat comes from within, as the **Black Widow** must reconcile her heroic center with that side of her that longs for safety and security. Unlike those heroines who strive against invasions of their psyche by outsiders, she must resolve the conflict within herself if she is to survive.

The passage in which she does so not only clears that conflict, but ties the whole plot into Claremont's central thesis, the establishment of identity. **From pg. 26, MTU #87:** "**[The Black Widow]** reaches deep inside herself ... drawing on her indomitable will, a part of her so special that — even if she was the school teacher she'd once believed herself to be — it would have set her apart from other women. And by touching that unique corner of her soul ... she finally, truly knows **who she is** [emphasis mine]. Not Nancy Rushman, but Natasha Romanoff, the

Black Widow. The best secret agent in the world."

Jean Grey/Marvel Girl/Phoenix is easily the most famous Claremont heroine, yet for all that fame the jury is still out in discussions of just what happened to the character. Did the mind-ripping that she underwent at the hands of Mastermind expose a darker side of Jean's mind, much as **Viper's** torture of the **Black Widow** brought out the antithetical Nancy Rushman? Or did **Mastermind's** elaborate illusions corrupt some entity called the **Phoenix**, which has possessed the mind and form of Jean Grey?

There is evidence for either argument. Both **Phoenix's** first words (quoted earlier in this article) and her final descriptions of **Dark Phoenix** suggest that Jean and **Phoenix** are separate entities. But in the interim, Claremont gave us a character who, if she were not truly Jean Grey, was similar enough to defy detection by most readers until it was all over.

Whichever case is true, it is certain that the mind-ripping scenario is demonstrated, in the Phoenix saga with a fullness never before witnessed Mastermind's careful, delicate reconditioning overtakes Jean Grey before she is aware of it, but when he is discovered, her rage at the deceptions practiced on her is unstoppable Like **Colleen Wing** and **Satana** before her, like **Storm** after her, **Phoenix** delivers retribution to the man who has dared tamper with her independence, and leaves him a soulless husk of a man.

Here our study of other plotlines may answer one of the great weaknesses of the Phoenix plotline; namely, how could so advanced a telepath as **Phoenix** fall victim to the manipulations of a second-rate illusionist like **Mastermind**? One answer is to say it's bad plotting. Another answer (valid as an interpretation even if Claremont didn't originally intend it) is that she didn't detect the schemes of Mastermind because, subconsciously, she didn't want to.

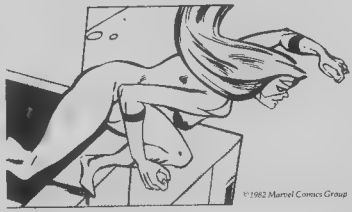
This suggestion will ire those who swore by Jean Grey's purity and devotion, but who is to say that that purity and devotion passed the threshold of death (which created **Phoenix**) unscathed? While not making her character more admirable, it does add dimension to Jean grey to suggest that a secret side of her, like the side of the Widow that created Nancy Rushman, found the corruption offered by **Mastermind** rather vaguely appealing.

The problem with this analysis, with suggesting that the mind-ripping **Phoenix** underwent brought out Jean Grey's darker side, is that the excesses her darker side indulges in are positively shocking. **Dark Phoenix's** murder of the population of a planet, not to mention the crew of a Shi'ar starship, cannot be pardoned by even the most lenient of judges. And this wanton destructiveness, as remarked upon by Margaret O'Connell in ***COMICS FEATURE***, does more harm than good to the cause of establishing noble heroines.

But **Phoenix** was **not** the title character of **X-MEN**, and so if she were to show signs of human frailty, it would not destroy the heroic core of the book. If one is bound to exhibit the strengths of heroines, as Claremont set himself the task, one must be honest and occasionally chronicle their weaknesses as well.

The fact that **Phoenix'** flaw was an outstanding one, one which dwarfs her virtues in its magnitude, has yet to be compensated for. But Claremont did not conclude his study of heroines with **Phoenix**. His experimentation with the identity of **Spider-Woman** in recent issues of that magazine promises to bear interesting fruit. And the Marada storyline currently unfolind in ***EPIC*** is true to the old mind-ripper scenario: a willful, independent woman retreats into a complacent, weakwilled persona after her soul is ravaged by an otherworldly demon. The repercussions that result when her earlier heroic persona reasserts itself will demonstrate the stuff of which Claremont heroines are made.

This compulsion to re-examine the same concept from many angles is the surest definition of an auteur in any medium. For Chris Claremont, his fascination with which qualities comprise a heroine, and how she reacts when her very mind and soul are threatened, mark him, whatever his individual successes or failures, as one of the most thoughtful scripters in comics today, and worthy of the critical description, "auteur"



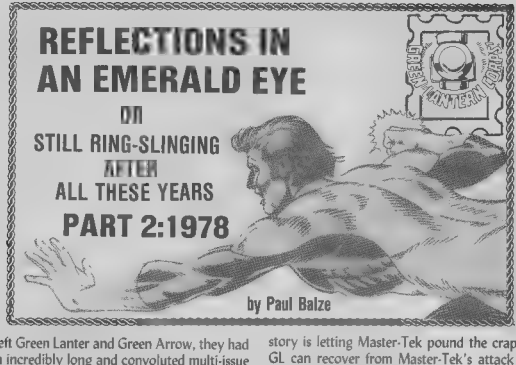
Spanky
by mark marderosian
"JOURNEY TO KELTON"
EPISODE 4: CONCLUSION
(c) 1982 ... various characters are (c) 1981 by their respective copyright owners
SPANKY, THAT WAS VERY MESSY WORK!
JADE TONIK!
AAAIEE! NOW I'LL HAVE TO HANDLE THIS MATTER MYSELF!!
HURRY, SPANKY! WE'RE BEING WATCHED! THE EVIL WITCH HAS TAKEN OVER THE PLANET!
WHA-?!
HER CASTLE IS HEAVILY GUARDED!
A FEW OF US REMAIN IN RESISTENCE, BUT TIME GROWS SHORT!
BUT, I NEED ENERGY CRYSTALS FOR EARTH. HOW CAN I HELP?
SHE HAS A MAJOR SUPPLY IN HER CASTLE...

GETTING CONTROL OF THEM WOULD ALSO HELP OUR CAUSE!
TRANSPORTER'S READY, JADE.
BEAM US TO THE CASTLE!
ON TARGET!
WE'RE INSIDE! THIS WAS TOO EASY!
ZAK!
YOU'RE RIGHT, MY COTTON-TAIL FRIEND!
2

NOW I'LL SHOW YOU HOW EASY IT IS TO KILL YOU BOTH!
HA! TRY AGAIN!
SPANKY, OBI-BUGS KENOBIE NEVER TOLD YOU THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR MOTHER!
HE TOLD ME ENOUGH! MY MOTHER WAS A PLAYBOY BUNNY!
YOU'RE RIGHT! I'M NOT YOUR MOTHER! IN FACT...
...I'M NOT RELATED TO YOU AT ALL!!
STRUG!
HA-HA HA HA HA!
TRAK!

SAY!
LOOK, WITCH!
WHA-
NO! NO!
ARRGG-
AAAAAAAAAAAAAEEEEEEEEEEE
SPANKY!
CRACK!

IT'S OVER! WE WON!
YEH... SHE ALWAYS DID HAVE A THING ABOUT MIRRORS!
STILL, I WONDER HOW SHE GOT ALL THAT EXTRA POWER?
MEANWHILE, IN THE EXECUTIVE SUITE OF A NEARBY BUILDING...
mogul oil
WELL, THAT PLAN OF YOURS FAILED MISERABLY!
MY PLAN? IT WAS YOUR PLAN, FOOL!
SHUT UP, OR I'LL SHOW YOU MY FACE!
BIG DEAL! I'LL SHOW YOU MY FACE!
SOON...
SPANKY, THANK YOU! AND THE ENERGY CRYSTALS FOR EARTH HAVE BEEN LOADED ONTO YOUR SHIP!
THANK YOU, MAYOR HUPPLE!
YES, THIS ADVENTURE REMINDS ME OF THE TIME GENERAL HAXTEN AND I BATTLED TOGETHER IN THE BLAH-BLAH BLAH, BLAH AND BLAH-BLAH AS
SO WE DECIDED TO GO BLAH-BLAH GO CIOTL!
BYE, SPANKY!
BYE, JADE. SEE YOU SOON!
AND THEN, WE BLAH BLAH BLAH-BLAH!
NEXT: SPANKY RETURNS TO EARTH IN AN ALL-NEW ADVENTURE: "NORMA DEAN" DON'T MISS IT! -MARDEROSIAN



When last we left Green Lanter and Green Arrow, they had just completed an incredibly long and convoluted multi-issue story. They were gearing up for the (gasp, drum roll, dramatic pause) big, magnificent, spectacular *100th issue*! Not bad, considering that there was a four-year gap between #89 and #90.

Since the book's 100th issue had to be something really special, Julius Schwartz & Co. probably racked their brains for ideas. They couldn't very well do an epic. After all, they'd just ended one. So, after considering that the book had been enthusiastically received as a team book, and as such had become monthly for the first time ever, the decision was made to split up GL and GA for one issue and have a separate story of each in #100.

Gee, what faultless logic!

And, to top it all off, Mike Grell was busily pencilling thousands of Legionnaires for the 1978 *SUPERBOY/LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES* tabloid and as a result was only able to do the cover and pencil the GA story in GL #100.

The lead-off Green Lantern tale, "*Rider of the Air Waves*", was pencilled by then-newcomer Alex Savius. The story was worthy of GL's backup series in *THE FLASH*: It featured a thoroughly forgettable villain who—how shocking!—is actually not out to take over the world! No, Master-Tek is merely a mercenary out to screw up an underground communications center. Who paid him? We may never know. The story sure doesn't tell us. Now, *this* could have made a decent landmark story if it had only been developed some more. Someone wants cross-country communications interrupted for some nefarious purpose and GL and GA have to find out who and why before they can carry out their plot. Lotsa suspense and mystery and other good stuff! But, NOOOOOO!! We gotta have the new Air Wave! Big deal! A new version of a super-hero whose last appearance was in 1948! And whose gimmick was *sooo* mundane, the kid's got a completely different one! The kid can't even throw a decent *punch*, f'God's sake!! His big contribution to the story is letting Master-Tek pound the crap out of him until GL can recover from Master-Tek's attack enough to trash him. Great. Just what every super-hero needs. A teenage punching bag to distract super-villains with.

After Master-Tek has been hauled off to jail, Green Lantern returns to his 18-wheeler (remember, he'd just begun a trucking career), where Air Wave is waiting for him. And the kid has two big surprises!! Ready?

First, the kid has figured out that Green Lantern is Hal Jordan. No big deal. But, second, the *kid's* real name is *also* Hal Jordan. GL and AW are first cousins!

Wow! And they've never met before, either. Strange, considering how close the Jordan family has been portrayed as being over the years.

"This is a *first*," says Hal the Elder, "*Two super-heroes* with the same *real name*!"

The End.

HUH??? *This* is the big deal Anniversary story?? Sheesh!

Following "*Rider of the Air Waves*" is a complete index of the first 100 issues of *GREEN LANTERN*. Very useful for cataloguing, even if it does mis-date #90 and #91. Following that is the Green Arrow story, "*Beware the Blazing Inferno!*" Its plot is concerned with Ollie Queen deciding to run for mayor of Star City, a plot which would come to a head in GA's solo series in *WORLD'S FINEST COMICS* the next year. He lost, by the way.

Not exactly a masterpiece as landmark issues go, was it? It sure didn't compare with *DETECTIVE COMICS* #500 or *FLASH* #300. Or even with *GREEN LANTERN* #150, but that's another article. In fact, looking back over four years later, it has the feeling of a fill-in issue, like something is somehow out of place. Which brings us to #101.

#100 may have *felt* like a fill-in, but #101 really *was* one. AFter all, it said so right on the first page. "The Big Braintrust Boom!", authored by Frank McGinty, was really very good. It reintroduced the paraplegic, mighty-minded (ouch!) criminal genius Hector Hammond; Hal's brother Jim

Jordan and sister-in-law Sue; and an obscure villain from way back in GREEN LANTERN #67—Bill Baggett, a thug who somehow increased his will-power enough to wrest control of the power ring from GL. But he couldn't hold it long. Frank did some heavy research, that's for sure. Kept everybody in character, too. Not a bad story by any means...

#101 also had a cover by the unlikely combination of Mike Grell, Al Milgrem and Vince Colletta. However, the Milgrom and Colletta styles almost completely submerged the Grell influence. More's the pity.

Denny O'Neil returned in #102-103 with a nifty little two-parter containing some interesting little insights into everyday life on Earth-One. O'Neil doesn't waste any time here. By page three, we've a space battle and the death of an alien Green Lantern. We've also met our vile villain, Taupin, a slave who somehow survived the energy blast which fried everyone else aboard his ship.

Taupin hops through hyper-space to Earth, where he proceeds to bounce his ship off a dam. Now, here's our first intersting insight: When the spaceship pops out of thin air and cracks open the dam, do the dam's workmen a) Stand there with their jaws drooping, saying "Gawrsh! Didja see that??", b) Shake their heads and vow to go on the wagon, or c) Shake their fists at it and curse it for cracking the dam?

The answer is, of course, c) Shake their fists at it and curse it for cracking the dam. Really! They don't seem the slightest bit affected by the UFO's popping up out of nowhere! Now, I don't care *how* many aliens visit Earth-One in a year, NOBODY's gonna get *that* blase about it!

Green Lantern hears about the cracked dam from, of all things, the CB in his truck. Gee, it's sure lucky he just happened to be tuned to that channle and was within range! Hal zips into action and patches the dam, only to get zapped by Taupin. Interstingly enough, Taupin's ship's "Xantha charges" nullify ring-energy. How convenient!!

Cut to Green Arrow's workshop, which he seems to have moved from the basement of his rowhouse to a room over Dinah Lance's flower shop since GL #91. He and Dinah have Lover's Quarrel #4,768 and break up for the 187th time. Ho hum...

Then, the Guardians pop in to complicate things. They note that a "time-null" has appeared near Earth. This means that Hal *must not* go into space for *any* reason. Now, the Guardians'd *tell* Hal this, but by golly, they just *can't* get through to him! Shucks! So when Hal recovers from the xantha charge, he decides to "check possible orbits" for Taupin—and flies right smack into that damn time-null!

How 'bout that!

Now comes another one of those insights I was talking about before! Several days later, Taupin is on TV plugging a trip he's offering to "qualified" Earthlings to see the Universe! On TV! With Tom Snyder, yet!! And the next day, there're hundreds of people lined up to sign up—including Dinah Lance!

Unbe-freaking-lievable! *Everybody* BELIEVES this guy! Not a skeptic in the lot!

Remember, I said Dinah Lance was in the crowd? Now you'd think that she'd be suspicious of Taupin. After all, she's met an awful lot of nasty, nasty alien types since she joined the Justice Society in 1948 (remember she originally came from Earth-Two). But she's taken in. She has some really mature, adult reasons for going, too. In her own words, "Business in my *flower shop* has been *slow*... and my *romantic life* with Ollie is balked! What have I got to lose?" Sure, Dinah. Right. Life isn't a bowl of cherries right now, so you're gonna chuck it all!

Anyhow, Taupin is testing his volunteers with some screwy machine involving a headset placed on the volunteer so that the machine can determine if he/she qualifies for the journey. Dinah takes the test and Blip, Blip, she passes. Suddenly, Ollie Queen bursts through the crowd.

"Dinah! No!" he shouts. "You can't go through with this caper!"

Strong-willed as always, Dinah replies, "I *can*—and I *am*!" Ollie demands to take the test, of course. He fails, Blop.

Ollie fumes for a while about a spelling bee he failed in 3rd grade, then gets an idea. Since he's suspicious of this Taupin guy, he changes to Green Arrow, *climbs over* the spacecraft, and drops, virtually unnoticed in his green longjohns and funny hat, onto the gangway. That's right, virtually unnoticed. Nobody in the huge crowd notices him except the guy in the doorway of the ship.

"Pardon me, chum!" Arrow smiles. "I'm inspecting the *frammis*! [Really!] Government regulations, you know!"

To which the surprised man replies, "Oh, sure!"

Say WHAT??

--IN AND OUT INTO THE COLD OF SPACE! THERE YOU CAN EXPECT TO DIE QUICKLY AND HORRIBLY!
TOO WEAK TO RESIST GREEN ARROW STAGGERS FORWARD TOWARD CERTAIN DOOM
NEXT ISSUE
THE FATE OF OUR HEROES! TAUPIN LOOSE ON EARTH! PLUS SEVERAL ALARMING SURPRISES!
ON SALE 4TH WEEK IN JANUARY! BE HERE!
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In his haste to be rid of Green Arrow, it appears as if Taupin is willing to kill himself and everyone else aboard as well. The "air-lockless" hatch is one of those oversights which causes writers nightmares and sharp-eyed readers delight

GA hides himself in a kind of tunnel inside the ship (a tunnel which could by *anything*, for all *he* knows) and watches as Taupin has his passengers don metal skull caps hanging by cables from the ceiling. After they do, Taupin reveals his Dastardly Plan:

"This ship runs on *brain-electricity—your* brain-electricity! I tested you outside for the proper electrical patterns! [AHA!]"

GA reveals himself and tries to wipe out Taupin. But the villain orders his "crew" to wipe out GA and, helpless to disobey, they comply. Dinah kayoes GA, who wakes up to face certain death outside the ship's airlock. The airlock, by the way, consists of a single door in the side of the ship. No compression chamber, no nothin'. Just inside and outside. Funny how everything in the ship that isn't nailed down doesn't get sucked out into space.

BUT—SURPRISE!!! When Dinah threw the Arrow, she ripped loose her helmet cable! This revealed, she smashes Taupin to the deck with some judo. GA then frees the other "mind-slaves" and sets about trying to land the ship—about which he knows exactly zip!

Fortunately for everyone aboard, Ollie is spared the task of trying to land the ship without understanding the controls when another ship latches onto Taupin's with a tractor-beam or somesuch.

Taupin, using a neat little mini-ship, bails out and lights off for Earth. The guys with the tractor-beam take exception to this, of course, and try to blast him. But they miss. They do succeed in creating a rift in the time-null, though, freeing the Lantern. He's been in there for two weeks, though, so he's unaware of what's been happening. Gee, his truckload of whatever is gonna be awful late! Thanks to GL's naive interference, Taupin gets safely to Earth. Then, he promptly requests asylum from the U.N.

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Now comes the fun part. When GL gets back to Earth, the aliens who nabbed Taupin's ship announce that they intend to hold its passengers hostage until Taupin is turned over to them. Sounds awful familiar, doesn't it? And remember, this story went on sale January 1978, nearly two years before a certain bunch of nuts pulled a similar stunt. During the thirty-minute period before the aliens' deadline, GL and the UN take their usual actions: GL heads for a confrontation and the UN members debate and wonder what the hell to do.

Meanwhile, back on Taupin's ship, Green Arrow decides to create a diversion so that Green Lantern can zap the enemies. To do that, though, he has to go from ship to ship... and there aren't any pressure-suits handy.

So it's open-airlock time again, and Wonder of Wonders! He actually gets inside the other ship before he can explode in the vacuum of space. And the atmosphere inside the ships is breathable by Earthlings!

Ain't literary license wonderful?

Eventually, the Arrow is face-to-face with Commander—you ready?—Pi-X-Square of the Lucan battle fleet (Boo! Hiss!)! Then the Lantern makes the scene and everything is solved neatly via the old If-two-Earthlings-could-cause-this-much-trŏuble-imagine-what-a-whole-planet-ful-would-be-like trick. Pi-X-Square flees, our heroes return everyone to Earth and everyone lives happily ever after.

... Until #104, in which Itty, GL's little alien pet, dies. At least, they *think* he's dead. After all, when something doesn't move for five days, it's either dead or stuck in traffic on the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. Green Lantern comments that he never even learned exactly what Itty was. Gee, that's funny. He seemed to have a pretty good idea when he first met Itty back in *FLASH #238*! He knew that Itty's race were called Ayries and he immediately recognized the Vivarium, in which the Ayries lived. He also knew that they were harmless, that they did virtually nothing but exist, and that no one knows who put them in the Vivarium or why. Maybe Denny just forgot about the story. Or maybe the then-new editor, Jack C. Harris, didn't bother to check things out.

And so, they buried Itty—in a standard 3' x 6' x 6' hole with a stone marker bearing the word "Itty" (imagine the stonecutter's reaction to that!). "I hate to sound like a *coap opera*," Green Arrow says, "...but Itty would want us to *carry on*—to do our thing!" Actually, I think Itty wouldn't have been too aware of what was going on most of the time. He was usually like a parrot on a pirate's shoulder; after a while, you really wouldn't notice him. Besides, how does GA know what Itty would have wanted?

By this point, Denny has apparently decided it's time for Green Arrow to go off on another You're-not-a-man-you're-a-puppet-of-the-Guardians-Lantern trip. So he has GA bring up a certain "Thermaquartic energy" experiment being conducted by one Prof. Extra Drok—an experiment that could be real dangerous. The Lantern's reaction boils down to "Gosh, Arrow, I know it's probably dangerous, but I can't do anything until it turns the whole city into orange slime! The Guardians said so!"

GA zips off to Drok's lab, which is in the middle of a city.

GA travels by helicopter, and apparently lands it in the middle of the street (and must have, there sure ain't no helipad there!). Then he joins in the mass picketing (along with Air Wave, who feels that the experience of a protest rally would be educational! Geez!) Sure enough, Drok's device causes a menace, in the form of Glowing Purple Jellybeans from the Earth's Core!! (An Irwin Allen Production). These little buggers flit about, opening up oil pockets (YES!), bursting water lines, causing massive coronaries and doing other fun things. Against them, GA is useless. All he can do is scream at Drok. Air Wave, fool that he is, tries to grab one of the jellybeans while in his radio-wave-riding state and is promptly stretched off for parts unknown. Unbelievably, nobody in the cast seems to care that he's missing—assuming they even notice! GL figures correctly that dropping soil on the jellybeans will wipe them out, and then it's off to Carol Ferris' place for an epilogue and a few snorts. But there's a perfectly nauseating creature waiting in the wings...

...Waiting to pull down the Ferris mansion by its foundation in #105. GL chases off the creature, which is no mean feat considering the power ring's inexplicable failure to affect the non-yellow-colored beast. After shoring up the house and pulling Carol out, GL decides to take a sample of the strangely powdery concrete from the foundation to be analyzed. Carol, by the way, seems awfully dressed up for someone hanging around the house in the middle of the day. On the way to analyze the concrete, Hal sees that Itty's grave is open and empty...

Meanwhile, Green Arrow and Black Canary are at the Miss Industry Beauty Pageant, because a nut named Bito Wladon (recognize the name?) threatened to kidnap the winner. Sho' nuff, a couple of Modoran thugs try it before the contest is quite over. They get their hash mashed quite nicely, and Ollie and Dinah decide to 1) put the winner on a plane one day early and 2) call the Lantern.

Now, for those of you not in the know, Bito Wladon (better known as Sonar) is the world's most fanatical hometown boy. He thinks his homeland of Modora is the greatest thing since indoor plumbing and wants the whole world to know it. So, he uses his mastery of Sonics in a criminal career, with the intent of drawing attention to Modora. Sort of like Baltimore's own Mayor Donald Schaefer, only twisted.

Sonar tries to hijack the plane containing the contest winnder to Modora (and breathes remarkably well for someone flying unprotected at jet aircraft cruising altitudes and speeds) and he and Green Lantern battle. Sonar almost beats GL by amplifying thunderclaps from a storm that suddenly blows up, but GL ultimately wins. However, the shock waves from the amplified thunderclaps knock an engine loose on the plane, causing it to crash-land on a mountain. They also, quite conveniently, free Air Wave from his stretched-out, dematerialized state. He, too, crash-lands on the mountain.

Believe it or not, the only damage on the plane is that the radio is busted. No one hurt, no one killed, not even one bruise. But the radio is busted. Then—SURPRISE!! The house-eating creature has shown up on the plane! When GA's arrows fail to affect the creature, everyone spills out of the plane into the snow. Then the creature shows off its handy-dandy teleportation ability! PAF! There it is, waiting to eat you! Run, Dinah! Trip! Sprain you ankle! Watch in horror as the creature slogs toward you...

Where is Green Lantern during all this hoo-hah, you ask? He's taking Sonar back to Modora, of course. Sonar is, as usual, babbling about how Modora is "a *gem* among countries filled with merry, laughing people and awash in *peace*—"

WHOOMPF! The merry, laughint, peace-washed Modorans are also trigger-happy! They start firing at GL with anti-aircraft guns. After a bit of futile firing, they stop. GL and Sonar land near the guns. Why did they stop firing?

"We... unnn... are a *poor people*... we... er... ran out of *bullets*!"

Next, GL finds the Modoran courts unwilling to try Sonar for attempted murder, but quite eager to prosecute GL for—get this! for—get this!—violating Modoran air space! And Green Lantern actually allows them to arrest him! God! Soon Hal finds himself imprisoned, ringless, in a basement cell—with a bunch of dynamite set to bring down the house!

See what being a goody-goody all the time gets you?

Back at the plane crash, Black Canary is about to become Creature Munchies when up pops Air Wave. I tell you, Air Wave is about the sorriest excuse for a super-hero I've seen in eight years of comics collecting. Dinah tells him to run, to save himself. but, NOOOOO! He replies, "...I *can't* run! I'm a *super-hero*! I'm supposed to *save* you!... Oh, gosh... what am I gonn *do*?"

Why not try what you did in #100, kid? Let the monster eat you, thereby delaying it long enough for Black Canary to crawl away!

GA saves Black Canary (for the moment) and soon Air Wave is riding the air waves from a walkie-talkie given to Miss Industry by her boyfriend. He's *supposed* to be going for help. He winds up in Paris (where exactly is this plane crash, anyway?)...

In his Morodan jail cell, Green Lantern is saved from being blown up—saved by Sonar. Why? Because when the peaceful Modoran folk shot off their Howitzers earlier, they set off an avalanche which now threatens to bury most of the country with snow. Yes, most of the country. Wait until we geto to 1980 for more about how tiny Modora is. After extorting a full written pardom from the Madorans, Hal flits up to his orbiting truck to recharge his ring and stops the avalanche. First the ring, *then* the avalanche.

Musta been on hell of a slow avalanche!

Then Hal heads for home, hoping for "a quiet dinner with Carol and a dose of *television*." No such luck. First, he spots Itty's empty grave, repeating the same actions he went through in #105: "Why would anyone steal the body of a tiny *alien*? Doesn't make *sense*!"

Well, neither does burying said tiny alien in a full-size grave, Hal, but you weren't too concerned about *that*!

"Suddenly, he is struck with a *realization*—" Gee, how

convenient! Just like that, he deduces that the teleporting, foundation-eating creature is Itty, metamorphosized. Finally! After all, we readers have only known it for two entire issues now!

No sooner does Hal hit the Ferris mansion (repaired already?) than Air Waves calls (apparently direct) from Paris. Good thing the kid musta had a lot of Francs just in case he ever had to make a transatlantic (and transcontinental) call from a Parisian pay phone! "Breathlessly, the youngster explains the situation in the mountains—" He oughta do it breathlessly! The call's probably costing a fortune!

GL reaches the mountains just as the Itty-creature is starting to munch out on Green Arrow. Now, remember when GL took the sampel of concrete to be analyzed? Well, it turned out that Itty had absorbed all the calcium out of it. So he gives Itty about 250 pounds of pure calcium, which the creature absorbs. Then—awe-filled gasp!—he matures into "an *adult* form of what he is!" He apologizes for the "grief" he has caused and vanishes. Fine. But where did the other Ayries get calcium in the sealed, seemingly empty Vivarium? Did they just stay half-snail-half-starfish forever, never maturing, never changing? Hah?

Now we come to #107, a fill-in issue scripted by Bob Rozakis and also featuring the first-ever installment of "*Tales of the Green Lantern Corps.*"

Rozakis' effort, "*The Man Who Murdered Green Lantern,*" has a curious format: It opens with Green Arrow, Black Canary and Air Wave busting up an attempt to hijack the entire Coast City Airport. Green Lantern shows up just in time to finish things up. As the hijackers (a very forgettable bunch calling themselves the Yellow Peril) are packed off to jail, the Arrow asks the Lantern where he's been. "I was *hoping* you'd ask that..." GL replies, seguing into the story. Neat, huh?

SO--YOU ADMIT IT BELONGS TO ABIN SUR--
OF COURSE BUT HE'S BEEN DEAD...
ABIN SUR-- DEAD!?
...THEN THE GREEN BAND MUST HAVE MURDERED HIM! KILLED OUR CHAMPION-- STOLE HIS POWER RING!
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Hal, the story goes, is making another one of those long hauls which is destined to be late when he gets a message from the Guardians: "*Proceed to planet Ungara immediately to avert worldwide disaster!*" On the way, Hal remembers that Ungara was the home of his predecessor, Abin Sur. He soon spots the danger, a huge comet heading for Ungara. He tries to catch the comet with a power-ringed catcher's mitt (king-size), but the mostly yellow comet rips through it like a bullet through a damp Kleenex. Well, if he can't move the comet, the only thing to do seems to be to move Ungara. But first, he's gotta tell the leaders of Ungara what he's planning to do.

He doesn't get the chance. Incredibly, in all the years since Abin Sur's death, the Guardians have never told the Ungaras what ever became of him! As a result, when GL tells them of Abin's death, they assume that Hal murdered Abin and stole the uniform and power ring! The crowd becomes so violent that Hal has to ring up a shield to hold them off while he speaks to their president. The President, however, thinks Hal is really Sinestro! Then Hal's attempts to explain are cut off when several Ungarans climb over the shield and start beating the hell out of him!

GL is almost out cold when he realizes why the Ungarans can't see the comet: Their moon is blocking it from sight! Then, suddenly, the comet screams into view!

Instant change of heart time! "*Alien*—you *must* aid us. We were rash... misjudged you! Forgive us!—*HELP us!*" Sure, we just tried to kill you, but help us anyway. Right.

The Lantern figures that he can bat the comet away with Ungara's moon. What I can't figure out is why he feels he first has to bounce the moon off a planet-sized trampoline first and into the comet. Why not just use the giant hand to throw the moon and save the extra strain of maintaining two power-ringed objects? Surely it must take more effort to form and operate two giant objects than just one. In any case, it works. GL, now a hero to the Ungarans, tells them how he came to get Abin Sur's ring, rings up a monument to Abin (which, being made of ring-energy, should fade away after 24 hours, but I won't go into that now), and zips home to explain why the Ungarans' high-tech detection systems couldn't spot the comet (the systems were powered by Abin Sur's power ring energy, so they couldn't detect yellow energy). Then Green Arrow and Black Canary fly back to Star City and Air Wave flies off to Dallas, where he remains today. Now, Hal Jordan has one hour to get a load of vegetables to Portland (hope they didn't freeze solid in the cold of space!). End of Fill-in.

"*Tales of the Green Lantern Corps,*" scripted by Cary Burkett, was a harmless little piece about what happened when Katma Tui hauled the Mocker off to Oa following *GREEN LANTERN #99*. It amounts to Katma saving Oa from the Mocker single-handedly. This story is also notable for showing the largest group of Guardians I've ever seen, at least twenty. Just how many Guardians are there supposed to be, anyway?

June, 1978, was the beginning of one of the darkest periods in the long history of DC Comics: The DC Explosion. What began as a daring experiment in enlarging the standard comic book package ended as one of the biggest cancellation sprees since the late 1960s. By fall, 23 titles—40% OF THE LINE—were cancelled. Many of them had bitten the dust in the middle of stories, leaving plots

hanging to htis day (we never found out if the Ray drowned in the river after *BLACK LIGHTNING* #11, for instance). Page counts were increased to 25, necessitating the addition of back-features to most books. *GREEN LANTERN*' backup was supposedc to be "*Tales of the Green Lantern Corps*," but its debut was pushed back to issue #111. #108-110 would instead feature the Golden Age Green Lantern, Alan Scott of Earth-Two. Unfortunately, by the time GL #111 came out, the page count had been cut back to 17, killing the backups until 1980.

Those three Golden-Age GL stories comprised a three-parter wherein Alan Scott battles a Tong run by the original, centuries-old owner of the Power ring and magic lantern (though, at that time, they had been a mystic lamp carved from a meteor). Thanks to a surviving fragment of the meteor, Chang had remained young through the centuries. Eventually, though, Chang meets his doom as he is crushed beneath a fallen tree. Yes, in all those years he had the bloody rock, he never learned that it couldn't affect wood. What a jerk! Also, Alan seems remarkably young for a man who was fighting crime in 1940. Especially since he had just seen the work of alifetime crash down around his ears (the failure of Gotham Broadcasting, remember?). Not one grey hair, not one wrinkle...unbelievable!

AT the end of #100's story, Alan opens a letter from his ex-competitor, Universal Broadcasting. "I've been putting off opening this letter," Alan thinks, "knowing that it would force me into a *decision*—but now... *whatever* it is... I'm ready to *face* it!"

What that decision was remains unrevealed, nearly four years later...

To get back to the lead feature, #108-109 was a two-parter featuring a new villain, Replikon. It also featred the most recent break-up of Carol Ferris and Hal Jordan, and together with #100, marked Mike Grell's swan song on *GREEN LANTERN*. But more on those two aspects later.

Now, Replikon began as Xum, a pink, wraithlike being with a faintly human shape. For thousands of years, Xum hung around the asteroid belt waiting for his children to be hatched from their shiny, chrome-looking eggs. Patient sort, isn't he?

One day, an asteroid probe from Earth passes by and Xum hitches a ride on it. As the probe returns to Earth, things begin to get weird. The probe passes the JLA satellite, and "using powers we cannot *dream* of, he was able to see *inside* the satellite..." He sees The Batman, The Flash and Wonder Woman. "...now he slowly, slowly begins to *imitate* what he has observed..."

The asteroid probe is a product of Ferris Aircraft. And it's defective. So, Carol Ferris engages Hal Jordan to truck the probe to Star City, where Feris Air has a lab. STar City, of course, is the home base of Green Arrow and Black Canary. How convenient!

Hal hears some movement in the truck.

He gets in costume.

He charges the ring.

He runs to the rear of the truck—

SKAAASH! Scratch one trailer! Xum, now a grotesque, winged combination of the Batman & Flash with Wonder Woman's eagle across its chest, tears through the steel doors. The powerbeam passes harmlessly through him and he proceeds to trash GL without delay. So much for the hero! Then, Xum blasts off like a rocket, complete with a cloud of exhaust gases. So, Green Lantern decides to drive the truck to Star City while in costume. Like that's really gonna dissuade the baddie who's already thoroughly stomped his ass once!

Meanwhile, in an apartment over dinah Lance's Pretty Bird Flower Shoppe, Dinah & Ollie Queen are sitting down to what Ollie terms "Brother Ollie's Latest Ne Plus Ultra-Burn-Your-Guts-Out, Mouth-Blastin' Chili": "Whaddya *think* Dinah?"

"B-best paint remover I've ever *e-eaten*!" (tears running down her cheeks, eyes wide, hand clutching throat).

The repast, interesting as it sounds, is interrupted by the Slog (another great Denny O'Neil name), a punk rock group "tryin' ta raise bread for *drums* and *guitars* and *makeup*" by running a protection racket. Unfortunately for them, they don't realize just how dangerous that can be when the protectee is also a super-heroince. Ollie zaps them with a net arrow.

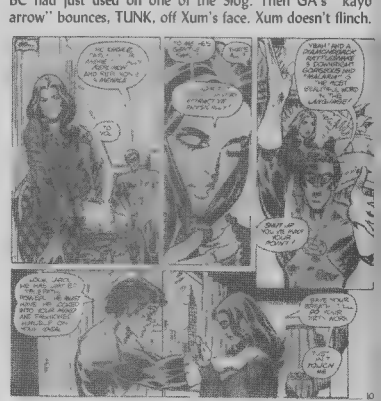
"While they're *untangling* themselves," says Ollie, "we can change to our *fighting* togs—"

"Togs," Gracie?

"That's a snappy word for *costumes*! You wouldn't want me to talk *ordinary*, would you?

Or even gramatically.

Green Arrow and Black Canary dispatch the Slog in a measly six panels, but then up pops Xum in his spiffy red and black tog—ah, outfit. He slams GA with the same judo throw BC had just used on one of the Slog. Then GA's "kayo arrow" bounces, TUNK, off Xum's face. Xum doesn't flinch.


YEAH! AND A CHAINSMOKING, PRETTY-MUCH-BALD, 5 DOWNRIGHT GORGEOUS AND "BALANCED" 2-FISTED BROADS LAYS-A-BOUT!
SHUT... YOU IN BACK YOUR MOUTH!
HOW... LADY... DO YOU FEEL?... FOR A FRIEND... HE WANTS ME TO ASSIST INTO YOUR MIND AND FREE YOU OF YOUR SENSE...
HAVE YOU'RE SEEN ANY GOOD OLD FASHIONED SEX LATELY?
...IT TOUCH ME

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Then GL shows up. He and GA throw punches at Xum, whom Black Canary has christened Replikon (imaginative, isn't she?). Replikon promptly flattens Lantern and Arrow with punches exaclty like theirs. Except, *his work*! Moans GA, "Anybody got any *bandages...aspirin...prayer*?" Then the Canary, who often tends to be the brains of the team (thereby escaping total uselessness), figures correctly that Replikon can't imitate three different, simultaneous acts. The three of them smash Replikon to the pavement, but he blasts off again.

Unsporting sort, isn't he?

Now, Carol Ferris rode into Star City with GL and so he decides to join her for a little midnight snack at her hotel. Imagine his shock when he finds her with a slick foreign type named Andre. Hal slinks off, muttering about getting a bowl of worms (honest!). Then—here's the kicker!—Andre is revealed to be Xum/Replikon in disguise!

WHen #109 comes, Andre-Replikon has "spent a week learning everything he can about Earth and its inhabitants..." and he hasn't even loosened his tie. Then he meets Carol for a walking tour of Star City. They meet Hal Jordan, but he leaves them, agonizing over Carol's attraction to Andre: "I hope Carol catches a *cold* from him!" Gee, Gal! He's stealing your girl and that's the best you can do? Hit him! Kick him! Punchiminnaface (Hsss! Revenge!)!

Eventually, "Andre" hears about slum clearance—and is inspired! He will make Earth a fit place for his children to live! Unfortunately for everyone on Earth, this requires some extensive atmospheric changes. As Replikon, he punches w hole in a storage tank containing 40 tones of fluorocarbon gas. This, of course, could eat the ozone-layer for breakfast and radiation-fry most life on earth as a result. Enter the hero, ready to save the world again.

But not if Replikon can help it. He tries once again to dispose of Hal, but takes off when he fakes being knocked out. Hal follows him and finds out just how foreign "Andre" really is.

Ollie and Dinah are eager to help as always, but they need one key helper—Carol Ferris. In the scene that follows, Carol is portrayed as a more-than-slightly-irrational-person—a characterization I can't recall her having in any of the previous GL stories. When Hal tells her that Andre is really Replikon, who threatens the entire planet, her reaction boils down to, "Sure he's a menace! But he's gentle and sweet and attractive!" Right, Carol. Let him kill three billion people because you think he's gentle and sweet and attractive! I'll bet you'd kiss a rabid poodle on the nose, too. But she reluctantly agrees and the trap is set.

Carol brings Andre to a partially-demolished rowhouse and sends him in.He finds himself trapped in an unrelenting assault by Green Lantern, Green Arrow and Black Canary. Man, they throw everything at him! Judo! Karate! Siren-arrows! Ringed-up giant fans for his gaseous form!- Falling walls! No mercy here, folks! GL finally bottles up Replikon in a lead cylinder he'd hidden underground and returns him to his lonely asteroid. Releasing Replikon from the cylinder, GL asks his motivation. Replikon tells him about the children, trapped in their Cragar eggs. GL is unsympathetic, to say the least. He flies back to Earth.

Wait a minute. *This* is compassionate, oh-so-humane Green Lantern? The man who practically cried over the apparent death of a mute little space starfish? Surely, he coul have contacted the Guardians and asked them if there was some world where Xum's offspring could live. And if Xum could survive on Earth, why couldn't his children? There seem to be some logic and reasoning problems here.

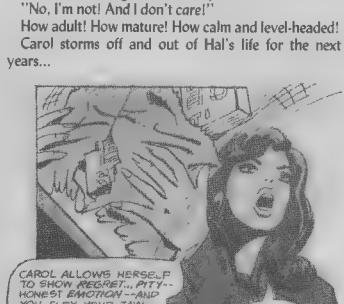
And speaking of problems with reasoning, Carol just refuses to be persuaded that getting rid of Replikon was the right thing to do. No, that's wrong. She *does* realize it, but for some reason feels it necessary to lay a lot of hostility on Hal anyway: "You're right— and I *despise* you for it!"

"You're not being *rational*!" says Hal.

"No, I'm not! And I don't *care*!"

How adult! How mature! How calm and level-headed!

Carol storms off and out of Hal's life for the next two years...


CAROL ALLOWS HERSELF TO SHOW REGRET... PITY-- HONEST EMOTION--AND YOU FLEX YOUR JAW AND YAP ABOUT GUTS!
WELL I'M WITH HER!
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Everytime Black canary is not going to have an active role in an issue, the "anger at something said or done by Green Arrow ploy" is used. This has been overused. And after all this time together, you'd think that they'd get along better or that GA would learn to think before speaking.

Which brings us to *green lantern #110. "Brand of Power"* is one of those stories which was written from a cover. And it's one hell of a cover, too! Too bad LOC doesn't have interior color, so you could see Mike Grell's work in all its impact! "Brand" was also the second appearance of the Silver Twist (also known as the Potluck Interdimensional Travel Agency), which popped up earlier in #92 (see Loc #7). This time, when our two heroes spot the Twist, they see someone or something leap from one of the Twist's openings to the other. They follow—and wind up in the middle of a Western-type town.

"More of them varmints!"

"Mangy *furriners*!"

"Gun 'em *down*, rannies!"

Hmmmm... guess they don't like strangers. They aren't even put off by the funny suits! Green Arrow has a good way to deal with this situation: refusal to believe that it's happening.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

"*Okay, okay... I believe!*" The two heroes dive for cover behind a horse trough. This time, the twist has handicapped the heroes: GL can only get a simple beam from his ring and GA's quivered arsenal is gone, replaced by a simple short-range bow and ordinary wooden shafts. Still, GA manages to disarm the gunners by plugging gun barrels and pinning clothes to walls.

Then, the day *really* turns bad for the Gunsmoke Ganbg. Up pops a gang of owlhoots, led by an orange-skinned, four-armed alien type with a ray-gun in each hand. The alien, named Borch (yet another great Denny O'Neil name), is of course the same alien who popped in and out of the Twist. He's also spraying the street with gunfire. One of his shots sears through the trough and blasts Hal right in the chest. Arrow hauls him into the saloon (with amazing speed for a man carrying another man on his shoulders), where the locals treat him to more of the local hospitality.

"That's fur '*nuff*, stranger!"

"It's *yore* fault them Clancy was able tuh *surprise* us!"

"An' yore gonna *pay*!" (Clicks of assorted guns being cocked).

Suddenly, it's Miz Lulu, the Lady Who Hangs Around the Saloon, to the rescue! She calls off the trigger-happy townspeople, saving GL & GA's hides. Then they notice a bizarre side-effect of the ray-blast: It tattooed Green Lantern's insignia on his chest (In *color*, yet! Strange weapon, that gun)!

And, since a lantern is a symbol of law and order in this reality (Aha! Coincidence rears its ugly head once again!), when GL comes to he finds himself Coyote Gulch's new sheriff. This, of course (I seem to say that a lot, don't I?), means that the Clancys and Borch are *his* headache.

Now, the ring's power is really reduced here. GL can't make a shield. He can't fly. But he *can* project a beam powerful enough to destroy most of the saloon's stock (temperance comes to Coyote Gulch!).

Rancy Clancy (hee hee!) challenges GL to a showdown with Borch at sundown (what, not at High Noon?). Because "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do." The Lantern accepts.

Sundown.....

"Mister Borch, I presume!"

Well, he ain't G. Gordon Liddy!

"...mind telling me who you *are*?"

"In your tongue, I would be described as a *reality hopper*!..." Not to mention a dirty fighter. Freen Arrow has to dispose of a couple of Clancys who think maybe Borch could use some help.

Hal beats Borch with a neat little beam which knocks all four of Borch's guns out of his hands. This leaves only the problem of how GL & GA are going to get home.

But Green Arrow has noticed something. Mainly, he noticed a sizable hole in the ground with a space scene inside it...a rift between the universes!

Into the hole they plunge, to show up right back where they started.

Back in Coyote Gulch, Denny uses the cliche we all hoped he'd forget, as Miz Lulu wonders aloud—ready? All together, now—1, 2, 3,—

"Who *were* those *masked men*?"

STOP IT!
I SAW IT ALL! YOU STARTED SHOOTING BEFORE YOU KNEW WHO THESE MEN WERE!
IT WAS YOUR OWN FAULT THE CLANCYS BUSHWACKED YOU!
MIZ LULU'S RIGHT!
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This story is one that the writer and artist were having fun with. If read with that in mind, the issue is enjoyably different.

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This is the kind of story that is not meant to be taken seriously. It's amusing, not profound. And we like Clint Eastwood too!

1978's final *GREEN LANTERN* story was "*Dark Things Cannot Stand the Light!*", which had originally been done for a *GREEN LANTERN SPECIAL* that never materialized. It finally appeared as a two-parter in GL #111-112 (December 1978-January 1979). The point of division really gives away the fact that the story wasn't meant to be a two-parter. On page 16 of #111, Hal-Green Lantern and Alan Scott-Green Lantern are blasted by Zalaz, the villain of the piece. One page 17, they float, dead or unconscious, in space as a frantic Green Arrow calls out to them. But does the story end here, at this logical cliff-hanging point? No, there are three more panels, in which the two Lanterns come to and the Arrow breathes a sigh of relief. The next-issue blurb is only a small, cramped bit of white lettering (probably a stat) stuck onto the black background. Then, following a breathless update on page one of #112, the story resumes right where it left off. Also, there is none of the sometimes-necessary repetition usually found over two-parters.

The story is that when the Guardians set out to create Order, they decided that "*science*" should prevail," so they gathered up all the "mystic force" loose in the universe and locked it away in the heart of a star, presumably forever. Somehow, though, this dude Zalaz stole it. And, for some reason, once he gets outside the galaxy, "he can wreak great *havoc*—perhaps rend the fabric of all *being*!"

Now, GL determines that the power rings would be useless against Zalaz because their power is science-based and they'd be fighting against the occult. They need "magic help," so they call the magic Green Lantern, Alan Scott of Earth-Two.

Even though Green Arrow is about as useful as a beef-flavored shark-repellent in this story, he tags along anyway.

Zalaz finally traps the three heroes in a room made of yellow wood, thereby rending both power rings useless. Then Hal, bright boy that he is, figures that maybe if he and Alan combine the power of their rings, they'd cancel each other's weaknesses. He's right, but only on Zalaz' crazy

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In this story, there's no other way it could have or should have ended.

world and only because Alan charged his magical ring at the Guardians' scientific battery. Boy, it's lucky his ring needed a charge ain't it?

Now, Zalaz had a noble motive. See, his mate, M'La, is sick. In fact, she's terminal. Zalaz has figured that he can use the Starheart to cure her. However, he also has to use the Starheart's mystical force to repulse the two Lanterns. They offer to help him, but he's one of those pompous-ass types who refuses help because it's "contrary to [his] nature to accept aid!"

Finally, Zalaz performs his great deed: he uses the ultimate power of the Starheart, which is the power of life. He revives M'La, but at the cost of his own life. Zalaz dwindles away to nothingness as M'La stirs on her bed.

Of course, M'La's face is never shown. Why not? Because she's supposed to be the most beautiful woman in all the universe, and no artist can draw a woman and say, "This is the most beautiful woman in the universe, bar none!" And so, M'La's face is always either turned away from the reader of viewed at such a distance that her features are indistinguishable. Neat trick, that.

But, that's not all! The Starheart speaketh! And it speaketh with the voice of the Green Flame of Life, from whence Alan Scott hath gained his power! And its flashback to its arrival on Earth-Two doth complete the retelling of Sir Alan's tale of origin, which dateth from 1940 (why art I talking like Prince Valiant thusly?). And, since the Guardians created the Starheart, that makes them indirectly responsible for the creation of Earth-Two's Green Lantern!

Well, I'll be damned. How 'bout that!

There's also a little of the humor usually given to Green Arrow here. Just a little, now, but it's there. In #111, Alan says, "It goes against my *grain* to be two against one—" to which Green Arrow replies, "Alan, old chum...I *admire* your scruples—*really*! But unless you *dump* them, you will never, *ever*, earn your universe-saving merit badge!" Besides, Alan, what do you call the average eight-against-one Justice Society adventure, a fair fight? Maybe you *are* getting old (*somebody* has to! Black Canary, who's been fighting crime for nearly 35 yeras on two Earths, and Earth-Two's 50-year-old Robin won't cooperate!)....

Then M'La goes to guard the Starheart foreveromore and the heroes return to their respective Earths.

NEXT: Join us as we follow Green Lantern, Green Arrow and Black Canary through battles with some of the silliest, most ridiculous villains on record, including: Granny Bleach and her boys! The Crumbler! Professor Ojo! ¡And Mrs. Vorpal the Chili Killer (honest!)! Also: the return of the Slog! The coming of Kari Limbo! and...

"WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GUY GARDINER??"

(Betcha can't wait!)

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HOW A COMIC BOOK IS PRODUCED

by Richard Howell

A good deal of commentary on comics art is made from relative ignorance. Fans and critics are quick to assess the talents of certain scripters, pencillers, and inkers without knowing—strange as it sounds—exactly what it is they do, the place in the production line which their task occupies, how dependent the relative quality of their work is to their collaborators, etc. Naturally, some aspects of comics creation are self-explanatory (i.e. the scripter writes the words, the penciller draws the pictures), but how many readers are sure of the exact difference between an inker and an embellisher? Between a layout artist and a penciller? How about the ramifications of writing "synopsis" (or "marvel") style as opposed to full script?

Perhaps some of you are wondering why ther should be any need for you to know about the manner in which comics are produced. Certainly, you might claim, it's not the reader's obligation to know about all the behind-the-scenes workings of a medium virtually designed for escapism. I can't help but agree—up to a point. It's much more difficult to relax and read the adventures of one's favorite four-color personae when one is aware that the newest group member

Cover Overlays from Comics Feature #8's back Cover.

was chosen solely on Marvel's (or DC's) insistence on gaining further exposure for a character whose own series is suffering from poor sales—or that the "startling new direction" of one's favorite series was caused by the incompatibility in the working styles of the two previous creators (one or both of whom are gone). It's distracting and acts to undermine the suspension of disbelief without which comics are merely a product.

On the other hand, there's no denying a couple of facts. One is that knowledge of the simple mechanics of comics creation can't help *but* increase a reader's enjoyment of comics. Knowing whom to credit (or blame) for aspects of the plot, script, and art which one enjoyed (or didn't—whatever) doesn't spoil the illusion any more than knowing "those people up there on the screen" are really actors. After all, somebody had to have drawn, written, etc. the pages. Secondly, no matter what reservations one has concerning the spoiling of the suspension of disbelief which good comics encourage, it can't be denied that the behind-the-scenes production aspects of comics *affect the product—including* the creative aspects. So however dangerous this little bit of knowledge might be, not knowing it is arguably even *more* dangerous.

So with that ominous warning out of the way, let's proceed:

Behind every comics series—every comics *story*, even—there are two very important considerations: *series* concept and *character* concept. For example, when Julius Schwartz conferred with writer John Broome and artist Gil Kane to revamp the Golden Age Green Lantern character into the now-familiar Hal Jordan-GL, once they had formulated their character concept (honest, fearless man recruited—by accident—by a corps of super-powered extra-terrestial guardians, and granted a power ring), they had a clear choice of series concept. Either they could restrain their Emerald Gladiator's conflicts to Earth-bound thugs and/or super-villains, emphasize the "extra-terrestial guardian" aspect and present outer space "GL Corps" adventures, or alternate the different styles indefinitely (or until one approach proves more popular). The latter course was the one which they chose, satisfying some of the people some of the time. At various points in GL's career, one approach proved considerably more popular than the other, and GL's adventures became exclusively devoted to the approach which had so much more sales appeal.

This concept, and the editorial implementation of same, becomes important because if one recognizes a concept so inalterably sympathetic with what one enjoys about comics, it's difficult for *any* creative team to so thoroughly misapprehend it as to render the series unenjoyable. Some series are a living testament to this. On the other hand, some concepts are so unworkable or so unmarketable—to today's market, at least—that they fail, at times unjustly blackening the creative staff's reputations. Is Marv Wolfman, for instan-stance, responsible for writing childish stories for "*Dial 'H' for Hero*," when the series' original purpose was to be run in an activity magazine for young children? Is Jack Kirby responsible for following his superiors' direct commands to create a little kid/big monster strip to attract bidding from the Saturday morning TV show market (which had—and continues to have—a great deal of interest in Kirby's previous creation, *KAMANDI*) and so creating *DEVIL DINOSAUR*? Is Bob Haney responsible for following editorial direction to follow the trends of the times and to involve the (old) Teen Titans exclusively in supernaturally-based adventures? Concepts and choice of those concepts' treatment play a large part in the establishment and tone of *any* story or series, and any discussion of the "whys" of comics creation would not be complete without such an assertion.

Once all of the basic editorial and conceptual decisions are out of the way, though, the actual mechanics of comics creation come into play.

First comes the story, naturally. Once the setting, direction, tone, and characters are established, it behooves te creative staff to find something interesting and saleable to do with them. Scripting methods seem to vary greatly from writer to writer (and to writer/artist team). As a working division, we can cite the difference between the "full script" method and the "synopsis" style. "Full script" is still utilized primarily at DC, Archie, and Gold Key Comics. It involves the writer verbally diagramming the action on each story page, breaking it down panel by panel, and, in a separate column, providing captions and dialogue for each panel. The advantages of this method are that the story can be evaluated for plot and pacing as a separate component by the editor, and that the editor has a freer hand with assigning the art for that story, since he is not restricted to the writer's choice of collaborators, or even the writer's available time for collaborations. "Full script" usually favors strong plotters, and, at its worst, produces stories which are so myopic in terms of the artist's options that they are deficient or totally lacking in visual interest. The "full script" method has also been castigated as an overly-businesslike production-line approach which robs the collaborators of whatever opportunities for excitement and visual/verbal interplay they could devise together, as the story is in the process of creation.

The old Juluis Schwartz-edited titles of the 1960s are arguably the finest examples of this scripting method. They featured intelligent, complex plotting (by the likes of John Broome and Gardner Fox, each with major contributions from Schwartz himself) and dynamic buy not overwhelming artwork (by Carmine Infantino, Gil Kane, and Mike Sekowsky, among others). The "full script" approach has its minor permutations, such as the instances in which the editor is a partner in the plotting, those occasions in which the editor and the author deliver to the artist fully-scripted, panel-bordered, and lettered pages, leaving him to fill in the panels (such as was done at EC(, and instances in which the artist sits in on the plotting sessions (yet receives a script in complete "full script" form). The "Full script" method is earmarked by the delivery of a *complete creative component* to the editor, which can be used to develop a collaborative

Box 5..Close shot of Diana and Hansel facing us in front seats, Diana driving.

DIANA: [that] behavior fits in with what's happening to EVERYONE! --

HANSEL: [You] — INCLUDING CRIMINALS! Reports show the "peace-epidemic" has cut the world's crime-rate to ZERO!

"#2: So how do we explain the [Skyjacker] TRAGG?.

Copy of Gary Bates script for Wonder Woman #213

effort in which the active collaboration of the artist, writer, inker, etc. is not necessary.

The "synopsis" style of comics writing probably has, at this point in time, more permutations than pure examples, but I will endeavor to explain it as much as I can. Simply put, (according to my information), the "synopsis" style was an invention calculated to allow Stan Lee to script 12-15 comics each month. In a nutshell, "synopsis" style scripting involves the writer handing or telling the artist a short precis of the story-to-be-produced, complete with however many plot asides, specifications, and/or character bits as the writer feels are necessary, and the artist is the person who actually paces the story, breaking it down into pages (and the pages down into panels), filling in gaps and adding details as he goes along. At Marvel in the 1960s, this invention was a godsend of the highest order, as Lee's small staff of artists (which included Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck) were excellent story men, each in their own right, and they delivered to Lee fully-pencilled and fully-paced story pages, each full of explanatory notes written in the margins, to which Lee needed only to add dialogue balloons and captions which matched each panel's action (or characterization, whatever). The "synopsis" style, as Mark Evanier mentions in his introduction to JACK KIRBY MASTERWORKS, has been called everything from an unprecedentedly liberating visual storytelling technique to a low-down plot to foist most of the writer's responsiblity onto the artist, but for whatever reason, as Marvel Comics grew and thrived through use of the "synopsis" method, that method became more and more prevalent in the industry. The "synopsis" style can be very educational to an artist, yet it probably robs the writer of the chance to control his own story's pacing—and leaves him more at the mercy of his artist than ever before.

As previously mentioned, the "synopsis" style of comics scripting has evolved into many different working methods. The most basic is that in which the writer, artist, and (most of the time) editor sit down and plot their series' next adventure, which the artist then draws, and the scripter then scripts. In such collaborations, a particularly strong-willed and/or creative artist will bring unexpected elements into the plot, frequently carrying it further as a story than the synop-

Mike Sekowsky pencils for unpublished Marvel B&W story.

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sis required. For example: Jack Kirby's unexpected insertion of the Silver Surfer into a plot (for FANTASTIC FOUR #48) which did not specify any such character, or Kirby's metamorphosis of a three-paragraph precis into the immortal FANTASTIC FOUR #57-60 "Doctor Doom/Silver Surfer" epic. Whereas Lee's collaborators were sufficiently inventive and self-disciplined to regularly deliver exciting, comprehensively-paced story pages ninety-nine times out of a hundred, subsequent artists and writers have not consistently meshed so smoothly into what has become the Marvel house style of collaborations, and alterations in that house style have been made. Gene Colan, for instance, prefers that the writer break down the synopsis' action into pages, since he tends to get carried away with mood shots, splashes, etc. at each story's beginning and then has to cram a lot into the last few pages (see, for example, DAREDEVIL #67). Many artists break their stories down into thumbnail sketches (small, abstract representations of each page's action and composition), to which they refer back while drawing the full-sized pages, or use as diagrams for the full-sized pages with the aid of an overhead projector.

As can be seen, although the "full-script" method and the "synopsis" style method each have their eccentricities, they both follow the same general production steps: concept, story, artwork. In each method, the artwork is drawn in pencil on bristol board (usually provided by the company these days), with an *image area* of 15" (high) X 10" (wide) —or "one-and-a-half up," as it's known (referring to the number of times the printed image is magnified to reach the size of the original). Although the 15X10 size is the most common today, until 1969 the original size of comics pages at Marvel and DC was 17½" X 13½" (or "two up," and that refers, again, to image area). Financially, though, it was more desirable for the companies to, instead of shooting each page's negatives separately, to "jam" four pages on one shot—but that method required a reduction in the size of the originals. Many of the older artists in the industry found it difficult to draw on the smaller page size after being so used to the larger pages, and the work of Kirby, Ditko, Infantino, etc. became spontaneously less detailed and (comparitively) less expansive when the change-over occurred. (SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #5, by Larry Leiber, was half done when the order came to decrease the original page size, so one-half of the artwork looks normal and the rest looks as if the artist was trying to "find his range.") Today the ban against the larger page size is not so strictly enforced by Marvel and DC (it never was at Warren) and some artists (such as Steve Ditko and Marshall Rogers) have been allowed permission to work at the old "two up" size. When allowed free rein, comics artists sometimes make surprising choices concerning original size. Most of the artists raised on the "two up" size (such as Jack Kirby, Mike Sekowsky, and Don Heck) prefer the larger format, while most of the younger artists are content to work on the scale in which they were trained (Marshall Rogers being a notable—and recent—exception). Other artists, such as Pat Boyette, Gil Kane, and (sometimes) Alex Toth, work very close to *printed* size, assuming perhaps that they will glean the optimal appraisal of the effects of the printed page through doing so.

NO, KIP -- IT'S ME. PAINTED TO COMMEMORATE MY VICTORY OVER THE ARIGUAN CONFEDERACY.
SOMETHING YOU, SANDY?
Huh? Oh... ah... NO, MAJESTY, IT... ah, HELLSTEETH, YES!
I FEEL LIKE A MARK IN THIS OUTFIT. Gi' ME A TUNIC AN' PANTS AN' SOME POCKETS TO PICK, THEN I'LL BE HAPPY.
© 1982 Marvel Comics Group

SOMETIMES, WHEN DEADLINES ARE PRESSING, THE LETTERING IS DONE SEPARATELY AND MERGED TO THE INKED PAGES BY PRODUCTION PEOPLE, OR "STRIPPED IN" PHOTOGRAPHICALLY BY THE PRINTER. THIS METHOD (STRIP IN) CAN ALSO BE USED TO KEEP THE ARTWORK FREE FOR POSSIBLE LATER USE.

(Above) The pencilled art by Jack Kirby. (Right) The finished inks by Ernie Chan.

The major difference between pages drawn from a full script and pages prepared from a synopsis is that the former group requires no notes and comments explaining the artist's breakdowns of the plot's actions, and the latter does. In the former case, the scripter need never see the story—in *any* for—after having handed in his script, whereas in the latter instance, the pencilled pages (usually after having been checked for quality control by the editor) are sent to the writer for captioning and dialogue. (Another difference particularly significant to comics writers is that the writer of a "full-script" story almost always is paid upon receipt of the *script*, not the pencilled and dialogued pages—therefore freeing the writer from having his payments delayed by a slow or negligent artist.) The "synopsis" style writer supplies a finished script much like the original "full" script, except that it (of course) lacks panel descriptions, and includes only dialogue and captions written *to suit the drawings that are already there*.

The editor then turns the returned pages over to the letterer, who rules in guidelines (in pencil) for each caption and dialogue balloon, and letters in the scripter's words in black ink. The letterer's guidelines are usually drawn with the aid of a T-squared ruler (to ascertain the page's perpendiculars) and an Ames Guide (a line-spacing aid). The letterer then borders the captions, draws balloon shapes—with appropriate tails leading to each speaker—for the dialogue, and rules borders around each panel. The letterer is also responsible for the lettering of the story's title, although usually not the character logo (a distinctively-lettered version of the character's or series' name, which is usually hand-lettered once and then photo-statted forever after). The lettered pages are then returned to the editor for proof-reading, after which they are given to the inker.

Although the above-described procedure is considered standard for the "synopsis" style of comics production, there are occasional deviations from the norm. In some cases, when deadlines are pressing, it is only xeroxes of the pencilled pages which are sent to the letterer (and scripter), while the genuine pages are sent to the inker. When the writer's script arrives at the letterer's, the letterer performs his same lettering functions (except panel bordering) on a separate sheet of paper—usually a tissue overlay—lettering all the balloons and captions in the correct shape and size, and sending in pages with nothing but lettering on them. The pages of balloons and captions are then spray-mounted onto opaque white paper, cut apart and trimmed, and affixed to the inked pages by production people in the office, or "stripped in" (a very similar process, done photographically by the printer). The resuults are the same: a finished page with much creative time saved. The time and effort saved is

perhaps only diverted onto the shoulders of the printers and production people, but the process has given the writer, artist, inker, letterer, and editor more time to get the next issue in closer to schedule)

The lettered and bordered pages are then sent to the inker, who goes over the pencilled figures in black ink, using—usually—either a pen or a brush. (Magic markers, charcoal, crayon, etc. can be used to give the inking a particular texture, but pen and brush are the tools predominantly used.) There are almost as many different definitions of what constitutes inking as there are inkers, with some inkers simplifying, streamlining, and "punching up" the penciller's use of detail and shadow, and other inkers (known more as "embellishers" these days) working over the penciller's figures and layouts, *adding* detail and texture. Some practitioners of the former school of inking include Frank Giacioa and Chic Stone, each of whom make pencillers' work appear more direct through their emphasizing of strong outlines and dynamic spot blacks. Steve Leialoha, Terry Austin, and Gene Day would each be considered embellishers—inkers who emphasize line texture, and who always give back more detail than is in the pencils they are given. Inkers frequently augment their available repertoire of tonal styles with zip-a-tone (also known as Ben Day screening). Zip-a-tone is a film which is sticky on the underside and has a pre-printed pattern on top (usually dots or lines). The film, which is sold backed on a type of waxed paper, is placed over the area to be covered, and a piece of zip-a-tone the size of that area is cut with an exacto-knife out of the sheet. Then it is affixed to the desired area to be covered, and burnished into place. Zip-a-tone is helpful in that to the cameras for color comics, there is black and there is white—no grey tones are available. With zip-a-tone, however, the illusion of a grey tone can be achieved through use of a designed percentage of black.

When the finished black and white pages are completed, photostats of each page are made, and given to a colorist.

When the finished black and white pages are completed, photostats (exact photographic reproductions on slick paper) of each page are made and given to a colorist. The colorist indicates the color of each object or person on every page by 1) painting the specified area with the correct color—usually using the Doctor Martin's series of strong color dyes, and 2) diagramming each color into its component parts in a four-color press system. (That means that in four-color comic books, each color can be broken down into some percentage—or combination of percentages—of red, blue, yellow, or black, the four available colors. Deep green, for instance, is 100% yellow and 100% blue. The colors are abbreviated B for blue, B2 for 25% blue, and B3 for 50% blue, and so on.(These color guides act as instruction sheets for the color separators.

The color separators are usually employed by the printer, not the comics production company, and faithfully break down the color guide sheets into separation overlays. These overlays are charts which map the appearance of each component color, and locate it exactly—both by its place on the page and by its percentage. In other words, for each four-color page, there will be one sheet for black print, one for blue, one for yellow, and one for red. In a panel in which a close-up of a man with red hair is seen, the black sheet will have the art team's drawing of the man (along with word balloons and panel borders), the blue sheet will be empty, the yellow sheet will be solidly filled where the hair appears and have a 25% zip-a-tone screen on it over the facial area (excepting eyes and teeth). The red overlay will duplicate the yellow one, since the scarlet color used for red hair in comics is 100% yellow and 100%red—and flesh tone is 20-25% yellow and 20-25% red. These separation overlays are usually done with sheets of either rubylith or amberlith (two-sheet acetate film, with the lower layer being transparent and the upper layer being film of either red or amber color, either of which is photographed by the camera as solid). The different overlays are lined up so that they match each other, and guideline symbols are placed on each overlay so that they can easily be lined up again when the camera plates for each color are shot.

The four-color overlay system, which provides the colorist with his/her own set of "originals" to color, is the reason why actual comic book originals remain untainted by colored inks. There are, of course, exceptions to this, but they are culled from examples exclusively outside the realm of normal four-color comics: color work for full-process color magazines such as *EPIC ILLUSTRATED* or *HEAVY METAL* is almost always produced in the form of a fully-toned painting, which is reproduced and separated photographically. Laser-tone separations, fast becoming the most prevalent method of full-color separations, involve shining laser light through a special gas in a cylinder, which shines through a photographic transparency of the color piece (which is strapped onto the rotating cylinder), and reacts to the light frequencies of red, blue, yellow, and black. The result is four plates—one for each color, much like a hand-cut separation—yet with more sophisticated gradation of each, resulting in a color reproduction of photographic quality. A variation, halfway between full-color and four-color process, involves making photostats of the original pages and painting over the stats with special photostat colored inks, which hold their tones on the slick stat paper. The painted photostats are then photographically color separated. (An example a comics story produced via this method is the *ELFQUEST* color volume, which utilized full photographic color separation, yet without painting over the original pages.)

A comic book which has reached the stage of having its color separations completed is ready to be printed. The different separation plates are aligned and each individual sheet of comics material (a form), which comprises, usually, 16 pages of any one comic, is stamped with four different print impressions—yellow, red, blue, and black. Then the pages are dried, trimmed, folded, and stapled—bound inside their covers, which are printed separately—and the production of a comic is complete.

Art

LOC is pleased to introduce a new section which will present the artwork of you, the LOC reader. FANDOM SHOWCASE will publish the artwork and the fiction submitted to us. These sections will appear every month. We look forward to seeing your work appear on our pages. Please carefully mark your work with your name, address and phone number and if you wish its return please include an SASE.

MIKE MACHLAN

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JEAN
GREY
ELEKTRA
CAPT.
MARVEL
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MAGIC
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82

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J.ORDWAY
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Don and Maggie Thompson

Talk with Steve Schanes of Pacific Comics©

LOC: What does the Art Director for Pacific Comics do?

Schanes: An Art Director is basically a "concepts person." He thinks of product lines that will make profit for the company. He does production work a lot, but his main concern is thinking up the concepts and turning the production work over to people whose forte that is.

LOC: Do you come up with those people?

Schanes: Yes, we have freelance production people whom we use here in San Diego. We've got one gentlemen named Jim Cornelius, who does all our high-quality color ads. I will do all the production work on the portfolios. Tony Frutti in Canada does production work on the Marvel and DC indices.

LOC: Do you initiate projects or simply accept submitted work?

Schanes: Actually, Jack Kirby came to us with **Captain Victory**. My brother Bill and I make most of the product line decisions We do have a lot of input from our editor, Dave Scroggy. We do take a lot of suggestions from dealers

LOC: They come to you to say, "We want a comic by so-and-so"?

Schanes: Yes, or they'll want a product line. We do a lot of market analysis. We deal with a distribution to four hundred shops directly and 3,000 retailers indirectly and we do surveys. We do monthly solicitations from our mail accounts. Sometimes on a solicitation, we slip in a questionnaire: "Would you like to see — what? Written by whom?" And sometimes those are very valid suggestions. Also, dealing with retailers, we have a very close idea of what the marketplace is and where it's going We know who the top artists are, dealing with sellers on a daily basis

Jack Kirby came to us with **Captain Victory**, and it worked out very well. We had told Jack we had wanted to work with him for years and had known him on a personal basis. He worked on an idea and came to us, and we came to terms, and he gave us our premiere book It's doing well. It's selling about 55,000 per issue, which is in direct sales. That's average Marvel sales in direct sales. But our books are profitable — very profitable. Because of the higher cover price, we're selling more actual art pages for the dollar than the average Marvel. It's doing fine

LOC: What is the marketplace and where is it going?

Schanes: The marketplace is a direct sales market, which is made up of approximately 3,000 shops nationwide and internationally — which consists of comic-book stores, Mom-and-Pop bookstores, bookstores that are starting to have racks of comics, a few newsstands spread here and there — mostly collectors' stores, which are growing at a very, very rapid pace. I feel personally that all comics — with the exception of major movie tie-ins — will be in direct sales only within five years.

LOC: What is the future of the alternative comics publisher?

Schanes: I think we all have the opportunity now to get a significant market share. I think that Marvel and DC are going to play catch-up ball to the independents that are started now. The independents are coming from within the marketplace and know the marketplace very well. It's a unique market, and we've got to create packages and do market analysis well enough to justify doing it.

The way Marvel and DC have traditionally treated their product is to throw it on the newsstands and hope it'll sell. They don't base their idea on much other than on the character. They know another Spider-Man comic will do quite well, so they bring it out. And then they have to wait on the returns

We know before we go to press how many we're going to sell — all guaranteed sales, presold. You've got to have the combination of factors that will make a profit — and that's what we're looking to do.

LOC: You've done original comics for about a year. Have there been any problems?

Schanes: It's done very well for us. We originally thought we'd have quite a problem introducing a new line of comics without having the team reputation that Marvel and DC have had. We found a lot less resistance than we had anticipated **Captain Victory** is selling extremely well; right now it's selling 55,000-60,000. **Starslayer** is selling 75,000-80,000 per issue right now — very, very good. **Ka-Zar**, a Marvel direct book, **Micronauts**, sells about 90,000. So we're holding our own, right against Marvel. We have a higher cover price than Marvel or DC, but it comes out to more pages per dollar for the reader. We're doing just fine.

LOC: Those are the advantages for the publisher; what are the advantages for the producer of the package?

Schanes: The advantages for the creative team are the following: The major advantage is that they own the character outright. And they have all exploitation rights. Therefore, if Jack Kirby's **Captain Victory** becomes a Saturday morning cartoon or vitamins or any other merchandise, Jack would get 100% of that money. Jack Kirby and Pacific Comics are also on a royalty basis. We were on a royalty basis six months before DC and eight months before Marvel. We feel that there is a direct relationship between the starting of our company and the rate of pay in the industry's going up. We have a 9% royalty of cover price after 90,000 copies are sold currently. That's our package. Our pay is $150 per page base pay rate, camera-ready. The better an artist sells, the better he's paid.

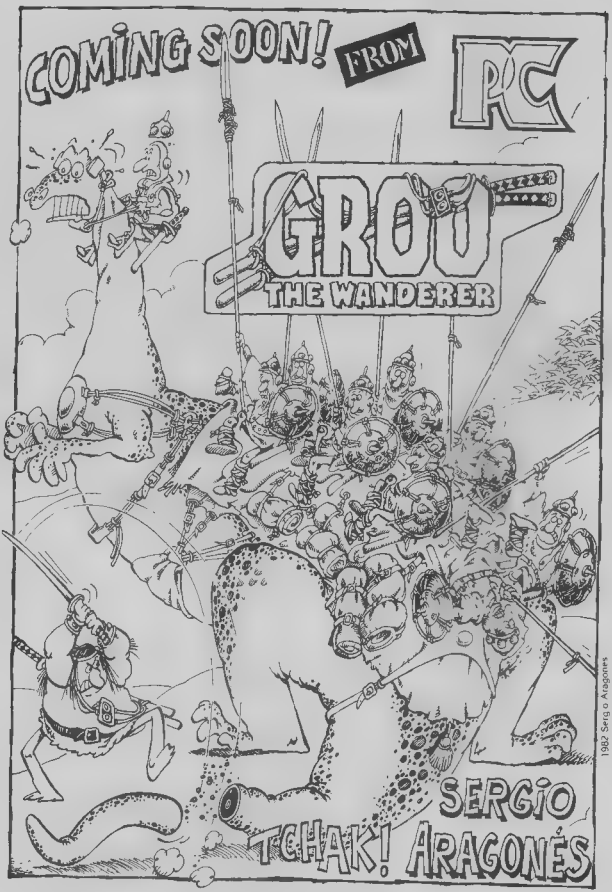
We don't do reprints. We don't reprint any comic that sells out. Years from now, an old story may come out in a different package, the same material in a different package. You talk about the collectors' market. You've got to be aware of this. Some people are going to be stocking issues for investment purposes, and those investors have a part to play.

THIS IS HOW IT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE STAR WORLDS COME TO EARTH!!!
CAPTAIN VICTORY
AND HIS GALACTIC RANGERS!!
WHERE THIS FORCE ARRIVES, A SAGA BEGINS!
YOU HEARD MY ORDER, ANOTHER
WHAT WE'RE LOOKING AT MAY BE A SERIOUS BREACH OF GALACTIC LAW!
JACK KIRBY
MIKE ROYER
STEVE OLIFF

As far as the royalty goes, Mike Grell hit it on the first issue of **Starslayer** Now Jack Kirby's starting a second book for us (untitled yet), and I'm sure he'll hit that with the first or second issue. Neal Adams' **Ms Mystic** had advance sales of 200,000 copies, so he'll make considerable money on that issue. We only have two comics out so far (we'll have more comics out very shortly), so it's hard to figure an average — but I'll say the average printrun is somewhere around 65,000-70,000

LOC: So the average producer wouldn't get the high royalty, but you'll increase your printrun as response dictates?

Schanes: That's correct. You've got to justify a royalty system. You've got to have a profit for the publisher; therefore, you've got to sell enough units to make it worth the money for putting out his best effort. Over 90,000 copies can be a very realistic figure, and it is a measurable piece of the marketplace very shortly. Neal Adams, Frank Miller — They can get it right now. In the next couple of years there are probably twenty-five artists who can get that range, because the marketplace is currently in an exploding expansion boom.


COMING SOON! FROM
PC
GROO
THE WANDERER
1982 Sergio Aragonés
TCHAK!
SERGIO
ARAGONÉS

LOC: Even with the recession?

Schanes: It has not affected the marketplace, as far as I can tell. Pacific Comics is one of Marvel's top three distributors on a nonreturnable basis. My sales of Marvels are up over 30% over last year — incredible volume in comics and related literature. We're doing very large — volume business and selling books. There are six four-color comics publishers in the field and maybe a dozen doing the black-and-white magazines. I'd say there will be six **new** color publishers within a year and a half. I have very little doubt of that.

Comic books are very profitable in the marketplace; magazines are not. Marvel has just changed all its Super Special magazine sizes down into comics size. **Bladerunner** has just changed its size to that of a comics-sized magazines on white stock. We've made up a name for the white-stock books; they're now to be known as Baxter books. (That's the white stock that **Starlord** comics are printed on.) They named the paper "Baxter" paper, so they'll be known to Pacific Comics as Baxter books, so we can identify that new trend in comics. I hope that the term will become generally known. I'm pretty sure it will, because nobody has a term for them. There's no other term. There's another paper stock used in the industry, "Hudson," that **Marvel Fanfare** is printed on. So we can refer to Hudson books. Marvel is coming out with a new line of Baxter books. Pacific Comics is coming out with several titles of Baxter books, ourselves.

LOC: Can you say something about your new projects?

Schanes: I've got a lot of projects. First, there's **Pacific Presents**, which should be out in July 1982. The comic will be half "The Rocketeer" and half a new strip by Steve Ditko, called "The Missing Man."

The Rocketeer character has been the back-up feature in **Starslayer** #2 and #3. We got an overwhelming amount of mail — a thousand letters — expressing excitement about Dave Stevens' artwork, and we think he has the potential of being among the top ten sellers of artists currently dong comics work.

We picked Steve Ditko to do the other strip, because we did a readers' survey in **Captain Victory** #2 and Starslayer #1. Of the people who responded (probably 4,000

in the survey responding out of about 150,000 forms circulated) about 80% of the people indicated they wanted Steve Ditko. I would never have guessed it. But I do see that Steve Ditko fans and Jack Kirby fans are the same generation. The same people who would be interested in Kirby would be interested in Ditko. So we're giving him a shot — putting him in the same issue with Dave Stevens.

I believe Dave Stevens is about 26 years old, he lives in Los Angeles, California, he has worked in the animation field, was born right here in San Diego. His influences, I'm sure, are Frazetta, Williamson, Russ Manning (he worked with Russ Manning for a while). I'm sure of the Will Eisner influence. I can see it in the artwork. He's very, very good. He gets a lot of information into five pages with the panels uncrowded

LOC: He's writing and drawing?

Schanes: At this point, yes. He probably spends three days on a page, so he's what you'd call slow. But it is the finest comics work being done today, really incredible illustration.

Pacific Presents will be a regular, four-color comic book. We have another book coming out, **Ms Mystic**, which should be coming out in June — drawn, inked and written by Neal Adams, who speaks for himself. It should give **Daredevil** a run for its money, as far as sales are concerned — incredible sales on this thing. In fact, on the first issue, so far, we've got advance orders of 200,000 copies

LOC: Are there any deadline problems?

Schanes: Yes, there are deadline problems. Neal Adams is overcommitted. But he is not slow. He is **not** slow, just overcommitted. He takes on too much. Therefore, it appears he draws slow. Whereas, in fact, he draws very, very rapidly. He also does a lot of commercial work in New York City that pays him a great deal of money. So comics up to this time have been on the back burner. Now the comics are getting economically competitive with his commercial work. But I don't have exclusive rights to Neal Adams; he can go to any other publisher he wants.

I've got a comic by Sergio Aragones coming out in September 1982, titled **Groo the Wanderer**. It's a humor book, obviously edited by Mark Evanier, about a slapstick barbarbian samurai. He's really outdone himself here —extremely good work from Sergio. We're going to make a big push on him. As far as sales go — it's one of our riskier projects. **Groo** is appearing as a small back feature in **Starslayer** #4 and #5; by that time, it will get to its own book. It's getting tremendous press from Sergio; he's a nationally known character with incredible connections. We're getting large press coverage in non-direct periodicals, newspaper articles, that sort of thing.

LOC: Do they tell how to order it, since their audiences won't be in the habit of going into specialty shops?

Schanes: No, I think people will be in the habit of going to specialty shops. Actually, I think that habit will come on rather quickly. More and more people are aware of direct marketing. I'm not only talking about customers; I'm talking about the general book trade, which is looking at the direct market more and more seriously.

LOC: What does the poor guy do who lives three hundred miles from the nearest specialty shop?

Schanes: That's a very good point. I think that particular person will have a dry period — how long I don't know — and as the independent distributorship system breaks down and direct distribution grows, we're in a transitional period. He will be picked up sooner or later. I don't know how soon; there is such a boom right now, I doubt if it will be more than five years before people in small suburbia have a specialty shop. Right now, as a distributor, I see suburban shops opening up more rapidly than I see inner-city shops. I can see another thing happening that has not happened yet; it should happen soon: I can see individuals in homes starting up a small fanclub-sort-of-thing, buying in quantity from a district distributor. I can see distributors soliciting individuals in small communities — similar operations to the seed companies or **Grit**, where you get 20% off if you buy your comics. Seed companies work traditionally through children or young adults. I can see comics picking up that same cue — have an individual in a small town become a sales representative.

CHAPTER 3
the ROCKETEER
by Dave Stevens ©
AFTER THE NEARLY FATAL RESCUE OF A FELLOW PILOT, CLIFF SECORD HAS MADE HIS FIRST LANDING AND PERHAPS HIS LAST-- AS A SINISTER FIGURE LOOMS ON.
WELL.. YOU'VE HAD YOUR MOMENT OF GLORY BUB
NOW LETS SEE IF MY HUNCH WAS RIGHT.
GET LOST!!
NOW-- I WANNA KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND HOW LONG YOU'VE BEEN POKIN' YOUR NOSE AROUND HERE
LONG ENOUGH-- NOW BACK OFF, FLY-BOY!!
WHAT IS THIS??
DON'T PLAY DUMB WITH ME, PUNK. NOW TAKE OFF THE HELMET!!
1.

LOC: Do you know any company with a mechanism for implementing this?

Schanes: We are developing such a mechanism right now. We are going to be opening a plant in Sparta, Illinois, in August 1982. As you know, four-color comics are printed at the World printing press in Sparta. And those of us in Los Angeles and San Diego will have a central shipping point to ship to fans and retailers across the country. A while later in the latter part of 1982, I should have some sort of direct sales program and can start some sort of circulation service.

LOC: The comics you've discussed are four-color comics; have you any Baxter books coming out?

Schanes: There are two books being worked on, but I can't give you any names yet. One will be a horror comic anthology with top names in the industry; it will feature four artists and one writer. The other title will be an adventure comic with one writer and artist.

LOC: Have you plans to increase frequency of your titles from their bimonthly schedule?

Schanes: If they're popular, sure I would. If, for instance, Neal Adams wanted to go monthly, I would. I think if I could make arrangements with Frank Miller or artists of that rank who would want to do more comics, great; I'll do it. I can't get better time with **Captain Victory** and **Starslayer** than bimonthly. It gives the comic more exposure; it also gives Mike Grell and Jack Kirby a chance to get their work done without the pressure of deadline. The **Starslayer** comic that Mike Grell is doing is the finest work he's ever done.

LOC: Are you an open market at this point?

Schanes: Here's how we handle new art submissions: I encourage them to mail me copies of their artwork. For samples, they shouldn't entrust original artwork to the mails, unless I commission it. I'll look at the copy, critique it, and send back a critical letter. Or, if I like something, I'll commission back-up features, four or five page stories, each telling a story of its own. That will enable me to introduce new artists at little risk to the publisher, also giving them national exposure

I am developing a book very shortly that will use separate artists and writers. Right now, I'm doing books that are camera-ready The artist takes on the responsibility of writing or finding the writer himself.

Very shortly — by the end of the year — I will be working with individuals. I do encourage new submissions from the artists and writers, and I'll look at any and all submissions. At that moment, I think I've not only got to grab today's talent, but I have to know the forerunners of tomorrow's. Marvel and DC are proving grounds for us, also — so that we can offer a tentative package to Marvel and DC creators who become popular at those two companies

LOC: Your emphasis seems to be on artists; are you ignoring the writers?

Schanes: No, it is just a reflection of the marketplace. People want Jack Kirby, Mike Grell, and the like. Right now I'm working on a mechanism to put artists and writers together

On Comics Opinion and Comics Review
LoC

FEATURE ARTICLE

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER IN WRITING COMICS

THIS PLACE IS A PLACE BEYOND ALL TIME, AND ALL SPACE! WE STAND ON NEW GENESIS, THE REALM OF THE NEW GODS...
YOU'D HARDLY KNOW THERE WAS A WAR ON, WOULD YOU, SCOTT?
IT IS AS IT WAS IN AMERICA WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED THERE, BARDA-- THE ERA OF THEIR WAR 'IN...I FORGET ITS NAME!
IN ANY EVENT, THEIR MEN WERE DYING SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY, BUT THEIR HOME LIVES WENT ON UNDISTURBED!

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ENGLEHART'S *MISTER MIRACLE* EXAMINED

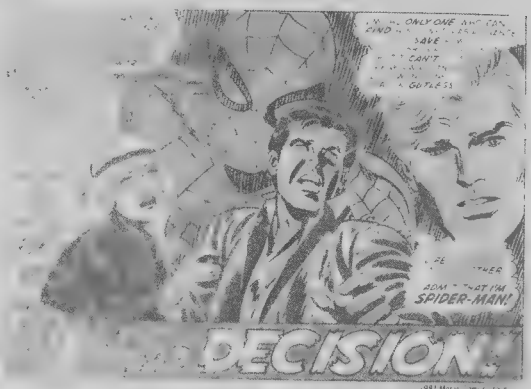
by Kurt Olsson

Having become interested in comics after reading novels like Bunyan's *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* and Steinbeck's *GRAPES OF WRATH*, I was embarrassed when I became a regular comic book buyer, and there were many times I hid a bag of comics under a shirt or jacket so that my parents or friends wouldn't know *I was buying comics*. Despite all the precautions I took, though, occasionally one of my friends would discover my secret, and (after the gawking looks) they would always ask the same question: "Why do you read comics?" Hoping my face wasn't as red as it felt, I would hide the comic in a book—or anything close by—and answer: "Because, ah, I like the stories and the characters."[1]

Since then I have become considerably less embarrassed about my interest in comics, but I still use the same answer when someone asks me why I read comics. This answer has come to fascinate me, because I have always listed story (or action) before characters, and this is contrary to the widespread belief that characters (not action) are the great

Kurt Olsson is a member of the creative writing program at Colby College.

[1] Keep this in mind because there may be a test later.



"Melodrama, though, resolves the story's conflict through action, without giving the lead character an opportunity to grow as a character because of this decision."

emotional appeal of fiction. Now, some may argue that comics aren't fiction *per se*, but since one simple definition of the comics form is the integration of words and pictures, this lets the reader use fiction's critical vocabulary to analyze the prose portion of any comic—allowing some leeway, of course, because of the comparitive limitations of the two genres.

So why my fascination with always listing action before character? In my opinion, this was my subconscious way of showing me that I have always felt action is emphasized more in comics than characterization. And, after considerable study of the form, I have found that action dominates character in most comic book stories. When this happens—to use a term from drama and fiction—the story is a melodrama.

A simple example of melodrama could read like this: our hero, after surviving a skirmish with his most feared superfoe, walks to the bank with his only living relative, his aunt. At the bank, our hero seats his aunt in a chair (she has a bad heart) and goes to the teller to cash her social security payment. Suddenly, our hero's arch-enemy crashes into the bank, smashes the guards, and demands the bank pay him $100,000 in cash immediately, or he'll kill them all. Our hero starts to rush to the bathroom for the proverbial quick change, but the villain sees him and stops him by screaming he'll kill someone if he doesn't. After this, the bank president explains that the bank has only $10,000 in ready cash; the villain, with a smile, says he's going to have to kill them all, then.

Our hero is now torn between two courses of action: either hope the villain is just kidding or change into his super-duds in front of everyone and risk his aunt having a third heart attack when he learns he is Hero-Man (or whomever). The villain takes out his super-ray blaster and chooses our hero's aunt as his first victim. The issue ends.

After a month of waiting, the reader learns that the aunt faints before the villain reaches her, the police (who sneaked into the story between issues) hurl a smoke bomb into the bank, and—thanks to the smoke—our hero changes into his costume without anybody seeing him. The next twenty pages show the hero beating up and defeating the villain, and the reader wonders why he just spent 50 cents for *that*.

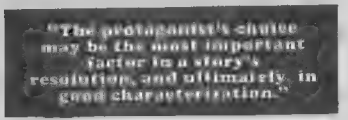
I can't answer that, but the reason for this drawn-out plot summary is two-fold. First, it hopefully makes one wonder just how many times he or she has read this type of story and stories like it. Second, the example illustrates how melodrama relies on the building up of suspenseful action, at the expense of making the story contrived and unrealistic as one impossibly bad thing after another happens to Hero-Man.

But if a story is contrived, it isn't necessarily a melodrama. Where the major melodramatic elements lie in a story aren't in its contrived action; they lie in the manner in which the story is resolved. In good realistic fiction, character is revealed by action, but the conflict is resolved through character, not action. What that means is that the character is faced with a decision and is given an opportunity to change because of this choice. Melodrama, though, resolves the story's conflict through action, without giving the lead character an opportunity to make a decision or to grow as a character because of this decision. Melodrama makes the

reader sympathize with the situation, but *not* with the characters involved. In the example, Hero-Man is never allowed to make a choice between revealing or keeping his secret; the story's action comes to his rescue, but it also prevents him from becoming a three-dimensional character—instead of a stick figure—becuase he makes no decision which he will have to live with or which will color his decisions in the future. How can anyone feel sympathy for a character who never makes a decision?

Despite this fact that melodrama sacrifices in-depth characterization for suspenseful action, some might argue that melodrama for melodrama's sake isn't *that* bad, as long as it's well-crafted melodrama (unlike my example). I disagree. Melodrama belittles the reader's intelligence since it derives its emotional appeal from characters who are seldom complex enough to seem human and it uses plots which employ suspenseful action in an attempt to retain interest by teasing the reader. Because of this, I feel that if comics wish to aspire to an older audience (while keeping its younger audience), comic book stories, *en masse*, should begin to move away from melodramatic devices to a more realistic approach.

When I speak of a realistic approach, I mean that character should not be dominated by action, but instead should be put on equal footing with action. This does not mean that action is necessarily less important in the realistic approach than it is in melodrama; rather, the action's influence on a story is given limitations and boundaries, so that action triggers character, but doesn't overpower character as in melodrama. With action spurring character, the protagonist (in comics, usually the super-hero) is put in a situation in which he or she must make a decision, and when the decision


"The protagonist's choice may be the most important factor in a story's resolution, and ultimately, in good characterization."

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SOON AFTER, IN TEXAS JACK'S LIMOUSINE...
STEVE ROGERS! SO YOU AND SAM WILSON FINALLY MADE IT BACK TO TOWN, DID YOU? WHEN WILL I SEE YOU?
ER, NOT RIGHT AWAY, SHARON. NOW DON'T GET ANGRY--SOMETHING VERY SERIOUS IS ON THE BURNER! I-I MEAN IT.
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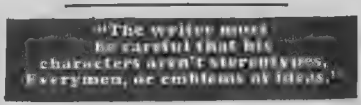
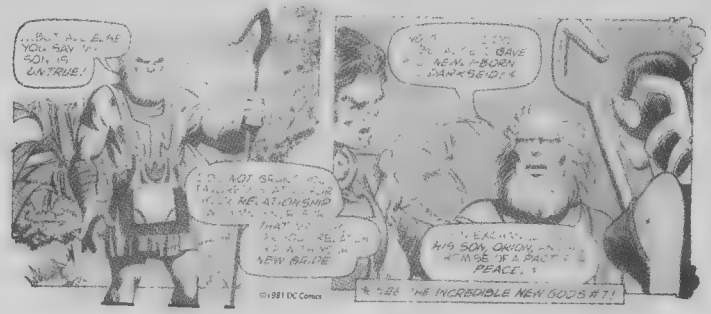


is made, the character has grown either more or less sympathetic to the reader. The character's choice also makes that character more psychologically complex, and hence more realistic.

The protagonist's choice may be the most important factor in a story's resolution, and ultimately, in good characterization for the character, but it is, by no means, the only tool the writer has to employ to make his lead character(s) and supporting cast three-dimensional. The writer must be careful that his characters aren't stereotypes, Everymen, or emblems of ideas (as Captain America, a symbol of The American Dream, can easily become). To avoid these pitfalls, the writer must imbue his characters with motives and reasons for why they act as they do, so that the reader can fully understand and sympathize with the characters. And, to make this job even more difficult, the writer must attempt to accomplish all this by showing character through actions and thoughts (subtlety is a key word in characterization), instead of having his characters go into long monologues explaining why they act and think as they do. The maxim here is *show, don't tell*.

Enough defining—now, a test.[2] Take a minute and try to remember as many things as you can about the person—myself—whom I described in the first paragraph of this piece (and no peeking!). If you can't remember anything, it means either: 1) this article has put you to sleep, or 2) I did a poor job revealing my character. On the other hand, if you can remember most of what I wrote and have even started unraveling my neuroses, then I was successful in my small attempt to flesh out a character. But since this attempt does

[2] Don't say I didn't warn you.



more telling than showing (not the best manner of characterization, as mentioned earlier), this piece will now shift its attention to an analysis of a practitioner of the art of character writing in comics, Steve Englehart, through a typical example of his work, *MISTER MIRACLE #19*.

Before I dissect *MISTER MIRACLE #19* to show the various means through which Englehart characterized the book's cast, a quick recapitulation will be helpful to those who either didn't read the issue or have forgotten about it. The story opened with Scott Free and his wife Big Barda talking about the war between the New Gods and Darkseid. Scott was disturbed because he wasn't fighting: Highfather then appeared on the scene and explained before he left that he swore an oath never to send Scott, his only son, back to Apokolips, where Scott grew up as part of a peace treaty with Darkseid. The married couple continued their walk, which was interrupted when four of Darkseid's cronies kidnapped Barda, but couldn't capture Scott. Highfather reappeared after this and told Scott that The New Gods were too busy to help find Barda, so Scott swore that he would rescue her as Mister Miracle.

Mister Miracle (Scott's super-escape artist identity) then travelled to Earth and remet Oberon, his former escape act assistant, who agreed to help him. Mister Miracle learned where the four villains were, but they told him to take off his Mother Box so that they could negotiate the terms for Barda's release. Although it was an obvious trap, Mister Miracle nonetheless complied and was placed in an "escape-proof tank" for his pains. He escaped, of course, but couldn't reach the villians before they teleported (via the "Boom Tube") up to the Moon with Barda.

To begin this study of Englehart's characterization in *MISTER MIRACLE #19*, I should mention that that issue was the first installment of the title's second run. (The strip had been one-third of editor/writer/artist Jack Kirby's "*Fourth World*" trilogy in the early 1970s.) Since Englehart found himself handling a character who, but for some guest appearances in *BRAVE AND BOLD* and the like, hadn't been seen for over three years, his job was to reintroduce the reader to the world of this Kirby creation, while emphasizing

"Characterization, in comics, shouldn't end with the hero, though and Englehart also did a good job in delineating the personalities of the book's supporting cast."

those elements of the Mister Miracle mythos which he wanted to incorporate into his own version of the series.

But the first thing which Englehart had to do was to establish Mister Miracle/Scott Free's character, since the super-hero (god or otherwise) is the main selling point of most comics titles and bears the responsibility of keeping the title identifiable. Within the first three pages, Englehart showed through narration and Scott's dialogue with members of his supporting cast that he was both a god and a man who now found himself caught between two different worlds, that he and Barda loved each other, and that Scott wanted to lead the fight against Darkseid but respected his father too much to leave New Genesis against Highfather's wishes. All of this seemed to take place in the background, since not much real action took place and the reader found himself dazzled by Marshall Rogers' intricate rendering of New Genesis.

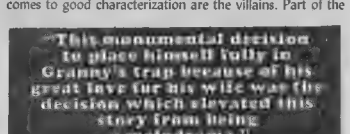
Then Granny Goodness and her cohorts Boom-Tubed onto the scene, and all the background information was thrust into the foreground. Scott and Barda's love, Scott's desire to fight Darkseid, and Highfather's guilt: all this was re-emphasized and added upon during and after the fight with Granny Goodness.

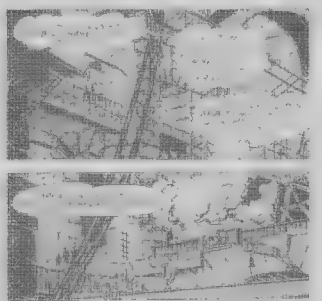
From New Genesis, Englehart brought Mister Miracle, complete with his grim mission, back to Earth and to his friend Oberon, where the reader was a participant in their joy at seeing each other and their shared determination to find Barda. But the most important part of this story was that Scott was shown willing to defy the greatest odds to find and escape with Barda—going as far as to part with his Mother Box (a mystical contact-comfort contraption which he had come to love). This monumental decision to place himself

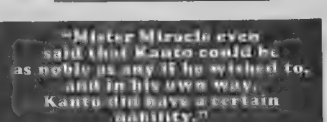
fully in Granny's trap because of his great love for his wife was the decision which elevated this story from being a melodrama; Mister Miracle made a choice which added another facet to his ever-deepening character, and the decision was consistent with the manner in which Englehart had been portraying Mister Miracle in the story up to that point. Mister Miracle's courage, in the face of Granny's insidious trap, showed him to be not only confident of his ability, but also showed him to be an escape *artist*—if not *the* escape artist. After Granny escaped with Barda, the reader felt that Mister Miracle *meant* it when he said he'd follow Granny anywhere to rescue Barda—that's how well the reader knew Mister Miracle from just seventeen pages.

Characterization, in comics, shouldn't end with the hero, though, and Englehart also did a good job in delineating the personalities of some of the book's supporting cast. Highfather and Oberon, for example, were given motivations for their actions and given depth in very little space: Highfather was shown to be protective of Scott because of the guilt he felt about the Hell he let Scott face as a child; while Oberon was portrayed as being fearless (to a point, of course) because of his concern about Scott and Barda's welfare. Also, by differing mannerisms and speech patterns (more tools which the writer can employ to help characterization), Englehart gave his characters more *distinct* realism. Even though their characterizations weren't as complex as Mister Miracle's—perhaps due to lack of space—Englehart had begun fleshing them out—a process which would continue for the duration of his tenure on the series.

In general, the characters who usually get the shaft when it comes to good characterization are the villains. Part of the


"This monumental decision to place himself fully in Granny's trap because of his great love for his wife was the decision which elevated this story from being a melodrama."




"Mister Miracle even said that Kanto could be as noble as any if he wished to, and in his own way, Kanto did have a certain nobility."

reason for this is because most villains aren't seen more than once a year (the Lee/Kirby Doctor Doom being a prime exception to this, and perhaps the reason why his creators managed to make him such a memorable character), so it's hard to go into their characters in any depth, but this isn't the major reason. The major reason is that most writers seem too lazy to make their villains unique, or at least make them different from the norm. Instead of giving them realistic motivations, many writers make their villains insane, which is a real characterizational cop-out since crazy people need no motivation (They do crazy things because they *are* crazy.) In *MISTER MIRACLE #19*, Englehart tried to sidestep such stereotyping by making his villains as three-dimensional as he could using different and contrasting motivations for their joint actions. A good example of this is Kanto, one of Granny Goodness' cohorts.

With Englehart's portrayal of Kanto, the reader learned a great deal about the villain—although Kanto spoke only about a hundred words. Even though Kanto was Darkseid's personal assassin, he was portrayed as a romantic with romantic ideals, such as always standing behind his allies—a rarity among comics villains. Likewise, he sincerely believed that Scott had earned his freedom because he won it through fair combat, according to Apokolips' "rules of order." Being a master assassin, Kanto was portrayed as being confident of his abilities, and he possessed a dislike for the small-minded and militaristic Virman Vundabar. Mister Miracle even said that Kanto could be as noble as any *if he wished to*, and in his own way, Kanto did have a certain nobility. He had his distaste for the mechanization of war, and he had his own (slightly warped) romantic ideals. This

complex rendering in just one issue made it apparent that Englehart had some purpose (as Kirby probably did before him) in delineating Kanto in this manner, almost as if he planned to have Kanto switch allegiances—or at least consider it. Unfortunately, Englehart left shortly after taking over *MISTER MIRACLE*, so the reader will never know.

As one can see from this study of *MISTER MIRACLE #19*, a lot of work goes into good characterization, especially in view of the small amount of words the comics page can hold. Because of this, one of the writer's best friends when it comes to conveying character is the artist. Through pictures, the artist can portray nuances in facial expressions and body positions which the writer wishes to bring across to the reader. Body language, in fact, can sometimes be more important than what the character actually says—a look at the work of Caniff or Starr will attest to this. Unfortunately, most comic book artists don't know how to incorporate body language into their artwork. There are exceptions; some of the best examples in comics, for instance, of conveying character through visuals can be found in Kurt Schaffenberger's *LOIS LANE*s, Mike Sekowsky and Dick Giordano's *WONDER WOMAN*s, Gene Colan's work, and Jack Kirby's work. (Kirby's work in particular is deceptively subtle.) But these examples are a minority. Part of the lack of good use of body language may have to do with the difference between the Marvel writing approach (plot sketches) and the DC approach (full scripts, including descriptions of each panel), but most of the problem probably lies in that many artists don't know (or care) enough about this aspect of their craft to incorporate any nuance or subtlety into their comics work.

Good characterization, as shown, demands that the writer and artist pay attention to detail and respect their characters. It's not easy giving a character motivation and consistency, but when done well, good characterization allows the reader to

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"...one of the writer's best friends when it comes to conveying character is the artist."

"Kirby's work in particular is deceptively subtle."

believe in the character's "humanity" and is more easily drawn into the fictional reality of the story. Like fiction, the art of comic book writing is suspending disbelief, and one way to help suspend disbelief is to have the reader believe in and sympathize with the character. On a practical level, though, good characterization goes beyond even that. While good characterization won't necessarily make a writer's plots any newer, it will make them fresher and more alive, giving them their own distinctive flavor. But most importantly, good characterization should prevent the writer from engaging in melodrama. When the characters seem human, the writer should find it very difficult to place them in contrived and unrealistic situations—unless, of course, the writer doesn't care about his or her characters. And then he shouldn't be a writer.

SO YA WANNA HELP WITH OUR LUGGAGE, HUH? WELL, NOW AIN'T THAT NICE OF YA! HERE, PAL... HOW'S THIS FOR A STARTER?
HOLY SMOKE! THEY FEEL LIKE THEY'RE FILLED WITH LEAD WEIGHTS!
THEY ARE! I DON'T ASK TO GET MUSCLE-BOUND UP HERE!
AH! SO MANY CHARMING BOYS! DON'T YOU HAVE ANY GIRLS HERE AT STATE U.?
AFTER LOOKING AT YOU, MISS STORM, WE'RE NOT SO SURE!
THE CHICKS ARE OVER THERE MOONIN' OVER REED RICHARDS!
WHAT'S WITH THOSE KOOKIE COEDS?! I GUESS A HIGH SCHOOL KID IS LIKE NOWHERE WITH 'EM!
DON'T CROWD, GIRLS! I'LL GIVE EACH OF YOU AN AUTOGRAPH!
MMMM! IF IT'S ALL THE SAME TO YOU, HANDSOME, WE'D RATHER CROWD AROUND!
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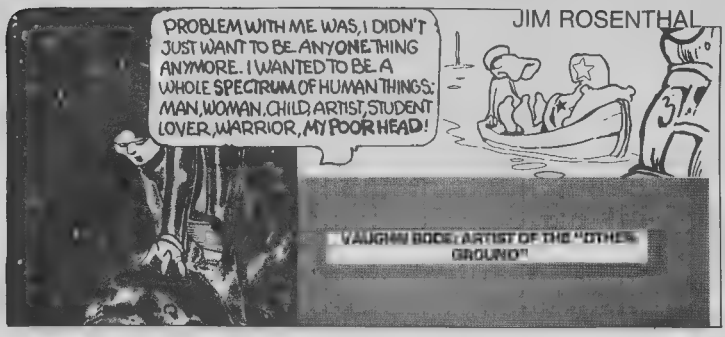
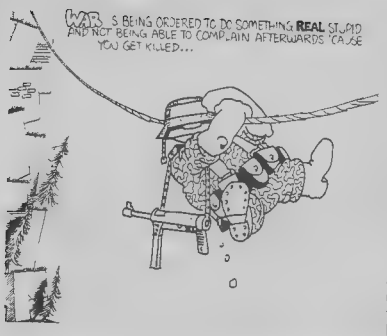

PROBLEM WITH ME WAS, I DIDN'T JUST WANT TO BE ANYONE THING ANYMORE. I WANTED TO BE A WHOLE SPECTRUM OF HUMAN THINGS: MAN, WOMAN, CHILD, ARTIST, STUDENT LOVER, WARRIOR, MY POOR HEAD!
JIM ROSENTHAL
VAUGHN BODE: ARTIST OF THE "OTHER GROUND"

The imagination of Vaughn Bode is the central aspect of his creations. The origin of artistic imagination lies in the inner contemplation of what might be real of posible in a different time or place. Bode left his private universe of mind to translate it to others through his art. To be an artist with emotional intensity is of the utmost importance in bringing the subject matter to life. One of the true fortes of Bode's work was that he was completely in touch with his creations. It is for this reason that his art work has left so profound an impact on the comic book field.

The casual reader of a comic book by Vaughn Bode will react on a gut level to what he is reading. The outrageous written and visual narrative evokes either pleasure or disgust. Thus, the work of Bode has been subjected to cult adoration or summary dismissal on Aesthetic grounds. The significance of Vaughn Bode's prolific and brief career lies in the magnitude and diversity of the audience which received the Bode artwork with pleasure.

The styles of Walt Kelly, Wally Wood, Joe Kubert, and Will Eisner were all influential in Bode's pencil drawings. These various styles were assimilated into Bode's own inventiveness to create the bizarre narrative flow with which Bode is associated Bode's greatest innovation was the "Pictography" panel format. Conceived in 1967, this format placed the balloons above and outside the story board-like panels of the strip. "Pictography" panels became the ultimate Bode style: "What with my own style of cartooning, writing, dialogue, character design and humor, all I needed was a format that had uniquely Bode features. And that harmony was reached with the research and design of the Pictography concept while I was a student at Syracuse University."☆ It is the originality of Bode that has created his mystique. Bode was driven to his work by personal feelings of loneliness and self-doubt. The career of Bode the artist reveals the catharsis of Bode the individual. An introverted childhood world of imagery led to the popular creations that people identify with Bode's work. Characters such as Cheech Wizard the hat and the numerous lizards of the four Junkwaffel comics are but a few of literally thousands of figures which in habited Bode's inner world. Bode's greatest personal accomplishment was to have the skill to convey his inner world through his art. In bringing his inner fantasy world to the printed page he allowed himself the personal freedom to expose the inner dimensions of his personality. In the comic bookj "Schitzophrenia" there is a deeply personal comic strip with Bode speaking to the reader from the moon in drag. Through the various panels Bode comes to terms with his own transvestitism, omnisecualism, et al. This "coming out" strip ran on the bottom half of a page featuring a Cheech Wizard story for balance on the top. For Bode to come to terms with his "pansexual being" in his comics was the ultimate exercise in his concept of his work being neither Aboveground or Underground but "Otherground"

In my experience with comic book marketing I've found that the Bode material is much more popular among mainstream comic readers than most comics regarded as being Underground. Only Richard Corben seems to possess the creative dynamism of Bode to attract comic readers at large. Corben's popularity can be accounted for by his astounding technical prowess. Bode's appeal to the wider comic audience is to be found in his style and the universality of emotions which appear throughout his comics. "The Man" is perhaps the



Bode's appeal to the wider comic audience is to be found in his style and the universality of emotions which appear throughout his comics.

least stereotypical and most sensitive comic book that Bode ever did. It is the simple story of a primitive man and his friendship for his stick which acts as companion, playmate, nurturer, and raison d'etre. "The Man" is the archetypal essay on the loneliness of human existence. The alienated Vaughn Bode uses the pictorial metaphor of a primitive man for his own simple and brooding soul. "The Man" is an unusual Bode strip in that it does not use the familiar characters of the later Bode art work. Any study of Bode's works in print reveals the repeated appearance of either stupid lizards or voluptuous females. The lizard is used as a symbol for the average reader. When Cheech Wizard makes a fool of the lizard, he's also catching the reader by surprise. At times Cheech Wizard's antics with the lizards are reminiscent of Walt Kelley's Pogo strips in style. The constant appearance of the hyper-sexual females is emblematic of Bode's rather sexualistic approach to life. The girls are there as a reminder of the constant flood of libidinal energy which keeps people uptight when it can't be released. From 1969 to 1975 Bode worked as a regular contributor to "Cavalier" magazine which was primarily an erotic tabloid. In May 1970, Bode came up with the feature title "Deadbone Erotica," which represented a departure from the older Bode universe of Deadbone Mountain. The "Cavalier" series chronicles a very liberated Bode expression of his sexual and psychic state of being. The art in "Cavalier" was the best erotic material Bode ever published and exemplified his ability to appeal to a very wide audience.

Prior to working for "Cavalier" Bode was active on "The East Village Other" and co-founder, "The Gothic Blimp Works" with Robert Crumb. Both of these tabloids were major focal points for Underground artists in the late 1960s. Bode's work appeared in Underground publications because of his need to do what he wanted without editorial pressures. In 1960 Bode brought volumes of his work to every major comic company only to have it dismissed as unfit for print. This early experience destroyed any inclination Bode had to work for mainstream comics. In spite of Bode's ambivalence toward the major companies, he did condescend to illustrate a back cover in full cover for "Crazy Magazine" in 1973 as a favor to Stan Lee. The extreme subject matter in Bode's material was not as objectionable to mainstream comic fans prmarily for stylistic reasons. The use of lizards as opposed to human figures makes even the most grotesque scenes palatable for most comic readers. The most severe violence appears in anti-war strips which are ostensibly anti-violence, iin import. The first installment of "Deadbone Erotica," entitled "Getting Shafted," depicts two lizards being shot with arrows while chatting matter of factly about how taxing the whole process of having arrows in one body can be. The absurdity of war was an essential theme with Bode in the

The most effective aspect of cobalt-60 was that it placed cute lizard characters in situations of graphic violence. It was an influential strip for a number of other artist.

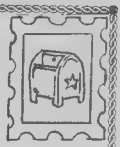
GOD-DAMN IT, CHEECH, LET ME SEE YOU!
ONLY IF YOU'LL SIGN A WAIVER. YOU GOT TO FREE ME OF LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES.
THERE, CHEECH, I SIGNED. NOW TAKE OFF YER HAT.
OKAY, HERE GOES, BUT I BET YOU GO BLIND.

1970s. Junkwaffel #2 featured a variety of anti-war stories. One issue of Wallace Wood's "Witzend" reprinted the story of "Cobalt-60". The most effective aspect of Cobalt-60 was that it placed cute lizard characters in situations of graphic violence. "Cobalt-60" was an influential strip for a number of other artists, such as Richard Corben, and indicated why Bode had such a wide following among comics readers at large. There is something quite pleasing about Bode's drawing even when they depict the more **grotesome** aspects of reality. This is in direct opposition to much of the violent material which appears in the majority of underground comics.

In certain strips like "The Masked Lizard," from "Junkwaffel" #3, there are remnants of Bode's interest in the trappings of superhero motifs. There is a continuity of subject in Bode's work that can't be found in many other Underground illustrators. The reader of Bode can follow the exploits of Cheech Wizard in numerous strips over the early 1970s which leads to a certain intimacy and familiarty with the character. Among the Undergrounds, only R. Crumb's "Mr. Natural" has the charisma and humor that Cheech Wizard comics convey. Bode did a regular Cheech Wizard strip for "National Lampoon Magazine" beginning in 1973 which greatly enlarged his readership.

The ultimate achievement of Vaughn Bode before his untimely death in 1975 was his cartoon concert. By displaying 35mm slides of his art while narrating and interpreting the action, Bode became the actual subject of his creation. Bode considered his act "High Conscious Comedy," as he actually relived the creative process which led to the genesis of the art which appeared on the screen. Vaughn Bode lived a brief and creative life. His art is quite popular today among a great variety of comics fans because it is a very beautiful and special synthesis of reality and imagination.

KATHOLICITY
By Kathleen Glancy
Dr. Bones' Bulletin



And now WHOOOOSH, the magazine for superbeings, brings you once again our resident physician, kindly old Dr. Bones, to answer your questions and talk to you about heatlh. (Dr. Bones doesn't regret at all that he is unable to enter into private correspondence with readers—God knows what gets printed is weird enough to boggle his mind...)

Hello again, you gaudily garbed neurotics. Before we get to my vitally important message in this week's "Dr. Bones' Bulletin"—some more of your puerile whines.

M of the Great Refuge writes: I know this may seem trivial, but lately I've had the most terrible dandruff. As you will see from the enclosed photo, for me this is a saerious problem. Can you help? PS: the fellow standing on my left is my brother-in-law, unfortunately. He says do you happen to know how he could get his hair to lie down?

Well, normally I'd say I'm a doctor, not a hairdress," but dandruff is a very serious problem for you, Mr. Try Head And Shoulders, or in your case, Head, Shoulders, Elbows, Wrists, Fingers, Waist, Knees, Ankles, and Toes. As for your weirdo brother-in-law, has he tried a crew-cut?

LL of Metropolis writes: I have a boyfriend who can fly, and often he picks me up and carries me thorugh the sky. But there's something that I don't like to tell him, only I fear one day I'm not going to be able to hold it down till I'm alone. Please, Doctor, is there any real way of stopping airsickness?

God, what silly complaints so far. I've always found a good belt of whisky works wonders. You'll have to decide for yourself whether old red-and-blue would prefer you stinking of booze, or else throwing up on his yellow S.

WWII of no fixed abode writes: I have a best friend who causes me problems. He frequently turns into ice, whereupon the temperature round him drops to zero. I keep getting colds, I had fifteen in two months—and the months were July and August. How can I stop getting colds?

Try thermal underwear. And a good belt of whisky wouldn't hurt. Or how about finding a new best friend?

DDL of Star City writes: I have a bad case of laryngitis, which makes it impossible to use my ultrasonic power and cuts my crimefighting efficienty in half, which annoys me. Also I infected my boyfriend, and while he hasn't any ultrasonic power he is very fond of the sound of his own voice and his temper, never of the best, has been vile. What's a quick cure for laryngitis?

You and he should go to bed (Geds, you silly old fool! You want the CCA to accuse WHOOOOSH of advocating immorality?—Ed) and ech have a good belt of whisky. This may not cure your laryngitis, but you will feel a lot happier about it.

N of Atlantis writes: Strange white patches which seem to be some sort of fungus have appeared round by gills, and all I want to do is float on my back; I've no energy left. What's wrong with me?

I was at a loss here, till I mentioned it to a vet I know. He said you should be put in a mild solution of manganese for 3 minutes twice daily, and care must be taken that the bowl is clean,and your water changed regularly. I pass this on for whatever good it is. Personally, I suggest a good belt of whisky.

RG of Hudson U writes: Doctor, you've got to help me. Perfect health all my life, and now, when I'm doing my damnedest to impress an older woman, *now* I get acne!

Calm yourself, boy. Patience. You're a late developer. look how long it took you to get through high school. The acne will pass in time, you lead a good healthy life. In the meantime, go have a good belt of—(Shut up, you alcoholic idiot! I'm not sure he's old enough to drink yet!(Ed).

The Dread D of the Dark Dimension writes: My head is on fire. What should I do?

I dunno, D. Obviously you've already had a good belt of whisky.

The JLA of 22,300 miles above the Earth write: We are suffering from one our periodic bouts of conscience about the Dharlu, a pregnant alien we keep in suspended animation in our computer. Can you tell us if this will affect her unborn offspring?

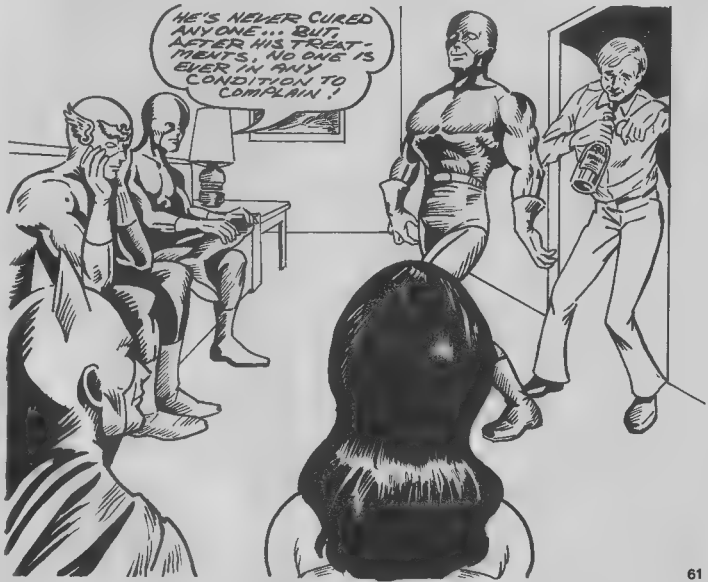
What in God's name possessed you to put a pregnant alien in your computer? Let her out at once, you sadists, and give her a good belt of— (*Enough* about belts of whisky, you aged sot!—Ed).

CK of Metropolis writes. I am immendsely strong. However, I am not *quite* as strong as some people think. So as not to disillusion them I pretend it's all easy, but the fact is I do have to strain sometimes. And, well, the last time I moved the world, well, I didn't brace myself right, and, well, what I'm trying to get round to is, Doctor—do you know a make of truss that will be invisible under a skin-tight suit?

Boy *you've* got a problem. I mean, I could prescribe you a truss but, well, if no earthly bonds can hold you, I—, well, I'm not sure whether it would, well (God, he's got me doing it too), work right. You'd best pop into Kandor and see what they can do for you.

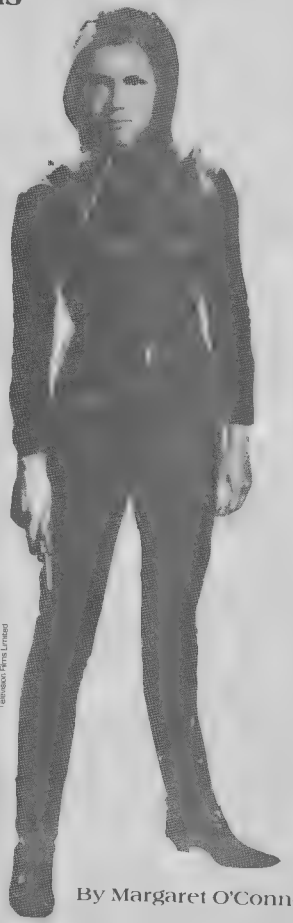
And now, at last, Dr. Bones' Bulletin. Today I want to talk to you about addiction—and in particular about the addiction that is affecting nearly every one of *you*. You know very well what I mean. They are irresistable to superbeings, the damned little things. And they're not harmless, like a good belt of whisky is, oh no! You know how addicts end up—bloated, unable to move. Already it's affecting you, and the only reason crime hasn't run rampant is that it affects the villains too. Soon everyone will just be lying about gorged. And then *they'll* take over! They control the Cosmic Cube, you know. Before it's too late, stop! Throw away the Twinkies! Cast off the chain of the cupcakes! Shun the terrible Fruit Pies. They'll take over, I tell you—it's a conspiracy, the whole world, several whole worlds, all gobbling, all guzzling—

(Kindly old Dr. Bones will return to these pages as soon as the Sunshine Home for the Afflicted with Delirium Tremens dry him out. What nonsense the poor old fellow was babbling at the end. And now, if you'll excuse me I'll get back to the delicious, right moist cake, the luscious creamy filling the———Ed).



AFTER HOURS IN THE BASEMENT STOREROOM OF THE LIBRARY, SHE KEEPS HERSELF IN FIGHTING SHAPE
I'M STRONGER AND HARDER THAN E VER BEFORE! THANKS TO MY SPECIAL DIET AND INTENSIVE EXERCISE!

Steed and Peel Investigate British Girls' Comics



by Associated British Corporation Television Films Limited

By Margaret O'Connell

Recently a Scottish fan friend sent me about a dozen issues of various British girls' comics weeklies. After an hour o so of plodding through one odd story after another, one thought began to recur rather insistently: "This is a job for the Avengers."

"Mrs. Peel, we're needed."

"What's the problem, Steed?"

"Dozens of six and seven year old girls have had to be hospitalized for severe saccharin poisoning after reading the latest issue of *TWINKLE*, 'the picture paper specially for little girls.' Hundreds of older girls, overcome by the influence of persons known only as Bunty, Judy, Tracy, Debbie, Mandy, Tammy, Jinty and Penny, have been convinced that they are plucky Victorian servant girls or heroic orphans cruelly exploited by grasping aunts and uncles. If we don't act quickly, the British population of females under thirteen who realize that there's more to life than boarding school, ballet, and netball will be decimated. Infant schools all over the country have already been overrun with sugary moppets chanting cloying ditties about poochies named Tinky, budgies named Elton, and dollies that come to life and frolic with accident-prone brownies named Elfie."

"You're right, Steed. This must be conected with that epidemic of haunted dollhouses and girls possessed by magical artifacts which force them to start taking gymnastics or ballet lessons from scowling middle-aged women with Slavic surnames who wear their hair in buns. If this isn't stopped, there won't be a single girl left in Britain who hasn't done time in a shady institution for young females where she thwarts the designs of envious bullies and embezzling officials while surreptitiously doing anonymous good deeds, only to discover in the final installment that she is actually the long-lost heiress of a kindly old countess."

"Our first step must be to infiltrate this insidious movement. It will be easy enough for you, Mrs. Peel, to win their confidence by posing as a schoolmistress from outer space or a guardian angel on a special mission from heaven to protect girls with names like 'Reckless' Roz from being deafened by disco music or falling to their deaths while shinnying down the drainpipe for a forbidden night out. But I'm afraid the roles of adult men in this deceptively innocent-looking subculture are strictly limited. I shall have to impersonate someone's eccentric old uncle who invesnt robot chumcs for girls ostracized by their schoolmates for having the wrong kind of bicycle. Or perhaps I could pretend to be an absentee father who's always away on business

trips, leaving my dutiful daughter to the tender mercies of her new stepmother and scheming stepsister."

"Personally, I think you'd be better suited for the part of the mysterious benefactor who enables a well-liked village girl to realize her dream of attending thee exclusive girls' school perched on a hill nearby. Or the aristorcratic Victorian orphanage trustee who reduces the venal beadle who runs the place to a sweaty-palmed sycophant whenever he puts in an appearance, but never quite catches on to the fact that the fellow's Uriah Heep act conceals a dastardly determination to swindle his charges out of everything he can, only to be repeatedly foiled in this endeavor by the spunky niece of his eternally-invisible housekeeper."

"Enough of these preliminaries, Mrs. Peel. We must set to work at once, before British comics fandom is irretrievably doomed to another generation of wondering why its female membership is sparse enough to be counted on the fingers of one hand."

"But before we do, Steed, there's one thing we must remind the readers."

"What's that, Mrs. Peel?"

"Always ask Mum's permission before using the cooker."

Believe it or not, all of the situations referred to above actually occur in British girls' comics (though usually not in quite the absurd combinations I've concentrated them into). In fact, many of them—especially those involving orphans (usually oppressed by unloving aunts and uncles, cruel step-relatives, or other unsuitable guardians), ballet or gymnastics students, and spunky Victorian servant girls—occur over and over again.

A few words of general explanation may be in order at this point. The usual format for comics published in Britain is a weekly tabloid about 8½" x 12" in size (a little taller and wider than an American comic book) and printed on newsprint throughout. Each issue of the standard girls' weeklies contains about eight serialized comics stories, of which the vast majority are "terminal series" (the comics equivalent of a TV mini-series) which simply end when they have reached the logical conclusion of the original storyline, and are then replaced by a new serial with different characters and a different plot premise. Each individual serial runs for at least four or five weeks; successful ones may continue for as long as several months. Each issue also contains two or three other features besides the comics serials. These may include a letters page (generally reserved for personal anecdotes or snippets of educational information, like the letters pages in Archie comics, rathr than comments on the comics stories themselves, as in the DC and Marvel lettercols), a brief text story, a page or two of tips on gymnastics or netball, a profile of a pop singer or TV star, or a recipe page (usually bearing the admonition about checking with Mum first quoted in the introductory sequence above).

Although all of the girls' weeklies have titles which sound as if they are derived from the name of some particularly popular leading character, there is no Judy in *JUDY*, and no one named Tammy or Misty appears anywehre in *TAMMY AND MISTY*. Some weeklies, such as *DEBBIE*, generally feature different four-color covers depicting the same girl (who can therefore be construed to be the publication's namesake) in various activities and situations, but the cutesy three-or-four-panel front-cover rhymed "stories" starring the personifications of *BLINTY* and *TRACY* provide about the most exposure that any of these essentiall nonexistent "title characters" ever gets. (The "*Tracy*" vignettes particularly are so inanae that they have to be seen to be believed. They basically revolve around the cloying misadventures of Tracy, a blonde teeny-bopper with a bubbleheaded expression, and her pet "budgie" Elton, a blue parakeet who already seems to have outlasted his now-faded rock star namesake in terms of time spent in the spotlight.)

As for the serialized stories themselves, most of them read like the results of an unholy collaboration between Charles Dickens and Mort Weisinger. The allusion to Dickens is no idle reference—the Victorian period is a great favorite with the anonymous comics creators who produce these weeklies. Almost every British girls' comic includes at least one tear-jerking serial about pathetic poverty and persecution reminiscent of *OLIVER TWIST*. All of these mawkish serials seem to be rendered in the same murkily indistinct style by artists who specialize in character who look as if they are suffereing from some lingering wasting disease.

On second thought, they might just be in the final stages of terminal exhaustion after several weeks of staggering through the convolutions of plots like this one (taken from the summary of our story so far at the beginning of Sept. 20, 1980 installment of "*The Fugitives*" [*DEBBIE* #397]): "In Victorian England, orphans Meg Warren and Jenny Draper escaped from Brackwood Orphanage where the orphanage governors, the Pearces, were trying to have Meg killed. The girls discovered that Meg was the Pearce's niece and that they had robbed her of a fortune which she should hav inherited as a baby. Humphrey Pearce, determined that Meg should not claim her inheritance, hired the murderous Magson to get rid of Meg. Jenny and their friend Mrs. Rossiter [note the abrupt, unexplained presence of a previously unmentioned character, typical of these gabblingly incoherent plot summaries]. Recently, all three had been working for a Mrs. Cavendish..." Naturally, in the course of this week's installment, Mrs. Cavendish, too, becomes the target of the murderous machinations of the Pearces, who seem inexplicably free to career around the countryside attacking anyone they please with impunity, despite the apparently universal popularity of their sweet young victims.

Other gems of the Victorian-waif genre feature such protagonists as Josie, a well-bred orphan suffering from amnesia after a stage-coach accident, who flits pitifully around the countryside begging and doing odd jobs to survive while she searches for the mysterious little boy whose existence only she dimly remembers ("Little Boy Lost," *DEBBIE #413, 415* [although these serials continue

I WONDER WHERE HE'S TAKING US? IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE A PLACE
I DON'T CARE IF IT'S A HOLE IN THE GROUND, AS LONG AS THERE'S A BED AND FOOD
HUSH! WE MUST LET OUR FRIEND KNOW WE'RE HERE. FIRST WE KNOCK THREE TIMES, THEN TWICE MORE. THEN WE HOOT LIKE AN OWL!
WHERE WE'RE GOING! EVERYTHING'S SO DARK!
After the secret signal, the children entered a long, dark passage, and then they heard the door close behind them, and a key turn in the lock.
I DON'T LIKE IT HERE. I'M AFRAID OF THE DARK.
IT'S ALL RIGHT, ROSIE. DON'T PANIC AND WE'LL BE ALL RIGHT
COME THIS WAY, MY DEARS! DON'T BE SCARED

uninterrupted for months at a time, I am only citing those issues that I have actually read]): Tussie, a poor orphan tricked into stealing various valuable items by a young woman bent on revenge against the businessman who swindled her father out of his fortune ("*The Secret Servant*," DEBBIE #410); and Storma, an orphan maidservant who inherits a mansion (but no money) from her upperclass employer, then outrages the dead woman's greedy relatives by promptly turning the place into a regue for injured and unwanted animals and, of course, the occasional stray orphan-cum-chimney sweep's apprentice ("*The Unwanted Ones*," *JUDY #1095-1097*).

But the most unfortunate orphans of all are the young heroines of "*¼children of the Night*" (*BUNTY #1183*, Sept. 13, 1980), a gaggle of Victorian slum kids who are literally starving in the streets when a smooth-talking gentleman offers them a home with a "very nice lady" of his acquaintance. The "very nice lady" turns out to be a cronelike creature who makes ominous remarks like, "[You're] all fit and strong, I hope! I've no place here for sickness" and shuts the girls up in a dark room after doling out cheese and crusts of bread, then gloat to her male accomplice, "Hee, hee! Little do they know that never again will they see daylight! Soon they'll be like owls in the dark—sleeping by day and working by night!" Undoubtedly the children are merely going to be put to work in an all-night sweatship, not the child bordello these sinister words suggest (after all, Britain also has its share of Moral Majority types for comics creators to beware of), but the whole thin g is enough to give impressionable readers a horror of the Victorian age for life.

There are also a few more cheerful period strips, such as the improbable "*Betty v. Bumble*" [*JUDY #1095-1097*, Jan. 1981), which is almost silly enough to have "*Lois Land Goes to the Workhouse*" as an alternate title. Unfortunately, poor Lois never had as many brains as Betty, who is lucky enough to be the only person of almost-normal intelligence in a strip otherwise populated exclusively by halfwits.

"*Betty v. Bumble*" is the strip about the greedy beadle who's always trying to cheat "the dear orphans" out of the treats paid for by the awe-inspiring (but unobservant) orphanage governor, Sir George (referred to in the introductory sequence). Bumble, the beadle, is not too quick on the uptake, either. Betty, the niece of his apparently nonexistent housekeeper (who fails to appear in so much as a single panel of any of the three installments I have read), is continually sabotaging the beadle's nefarious schemes—when she isn't simply lolling around like a lady of leisure in Bumble's own comfortable quarters, where she seems to be quite at home. (You'd think someone as grasping as Bumble is supposed to be would put a mere servant's poor relation like Betty to work scrubbing floors post haste, if he so much as allowed her to set foot in his house in the first place. Instead, he treats Betty with almost as much deference as he accords his employer, Sir George.) Yet the dimwitted beadle never suspects that our heroine is the culprit, even when she does something as obvious and easily-exposed as

So that's it! Bumble's cheating the little ones out of the horse and all to line his own pockets! I can't let this happen!
Jill, take this note to Sir George. It's important—so ride over on Dobbin.
Oh! If you say so, Betty
You must hand over the five pounds first, sir. You know what Mr Bumble is!
I certainly do! Here's the cash, so lead on!
This way, sir
Upstairs? What a horse doin' upstairs?
Later—
Where's Mr Bumble, girl? I've come about a horse
I know, sir. Mr Bumble's not here at present, but I can conclude the deal for him
A rocking horse? That old swindler! Just you hand my money back!
There it is, sir
I'm sure you'd rather give it to the orphans, sir.
ORPHANS BENEVOLENT FUND
Why, you you

arranging for him to take a spectacular pratfall down the stairs mounted on a rocking horse as punishment for trying to sell the children's new pony (*JUDY* #1095).

Oddly enough, those "historical" strips with maidservants as protagonists also tend to be more upbeat in tone, despite the vast potential for downtroddenness in this "*Upstairs, Downstairs*" theme. One of the more entertaining examples is "*Wee Slavey*" (*JUDY* #1095-1097, Jan. 1981), which, despite its rather oppressive-sounding title, is basically a humor strip. A typical plotline involves chicken thieves and a runaway bird that gets into the house and eludes all attempts at capture even after Nellie, the "wee slavey" of the title, has clapped the master's top hat over it in an effort to pin it down. This leads to a hilarious scene of a top hat rushing down the hall on little chicken legs, preceded by the terrified young ladies of the house, who fail to recognize the ludicrous true nature of this midnight intrusion, and instead run off shrieking, "Help! We are pursued by haunted headgear!" (*JUDY* #1095).

Another "period" strip that's good for a laugh, if only because it carries stupidity to the point of being comical, is "*Dulcie Wears the Dunce's Hat*" (Sept. 13, 1980 *TAMMY AND MISTY*). Since the heroine of this strip, though a

Dulcie wears the DUNCE'S HAT

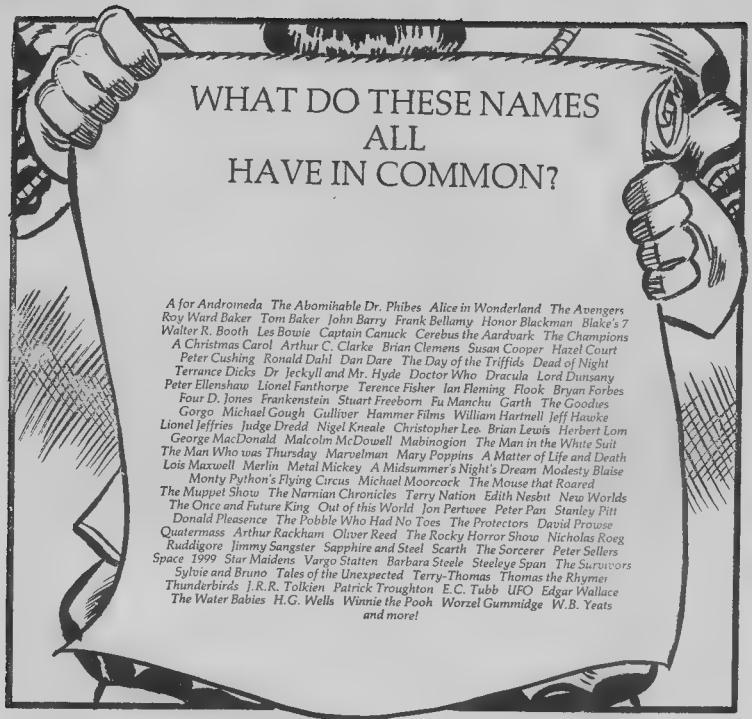
Country girl Dulcie Dobbs had started school in a nearby town, but had been taken by teacher Miss Bristle to be "dull and slow-witted" She told Dulcie to wear a tall "dunce's hat" in and out of class and at home, but far from inspiring disgrace, Dulcie found the hat could be put to good use. Following a storm, Dulcie debated the merit of these opportunities . . .
MMM . I MIGHT BE ABLE TO USE THE HAT TO HELP THE VICAR. HE'S GOT AN IMPORTANT VISITOR COMING LATER .
The vicar was helping local folk to repair storm damage . .
OH DEAR! THE TIP OF MY POOR CHURCH STEEPLE WAS BLOWN AWAY AND MY BISHOP IS COMING TO VISIT . BUT IT'S NO GOOD SIGHING
THERE'S JUST A FEW INCHES OF STEEPLE MISSING, ABOUT THE SAME SIZE AS THIS HAT . I WONDER, COULD IT TAKE THE PLACE OF THE TIP? ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT – GET UP THERE!
NEVER WAS MUCH GOOD AT HEIGHTS BUT HERE GOES. I'LL CLIMB THE BLIND SIDE, SO NOBODY CAN SPOT WHAT I'M DOING THEY'D THINK I REALLY WAS A DIM-WIT!
Soon . .
COME ON! THE VICAR'S BEEN RING TO DAD AN' ME . AND EVERYONE HEREABOUTS JUST ANOTHER FEW FEET
DONE IT! THE DUNCE'S HAT IS THE RIGHT SIZE AND FITS OVER IT FINE! YOU'VE DONE IT AGAIN, DULCIE!
She scrambled down . . .
IT LOOKS FINE FROM BELOW! YOU CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE! NOW TO REJOIN THE OTHERS IN THE FIELDS!
Her father somehow hadn't noticed Dulcie wearing the hat . . .
WHERE YOU BEEN, DULCIE? NOT LIKE YOU TO AVOID WORK!
I WAS JUST BUSY HELPIN' SOMEWHERE ELSE, DAD .

TELL YOUR PARENTS BEFORE REPLYING TO ADVERTISEMENTS.

Heavens! What is this apparition?
Oh, dear now it's scared my young ladies
I'll get the bird if I don't catch it
Help! We are pursued by haunted headgear!
Oh, dear! I'll really miss my chicks. No, a
Don't worry Cookie, I do some very special shopping tomorrow!
Very sorry, sir but a thief was after Cook's chickens and th s one escaped
No excuses! Never again shall this household be disturbed like this! Those chickens must go every one tomorrow!

Victorian, actually has a decent home of her own and even one living parent (her father), the scripter is forced to fall back on the time-honored plot devices of idiotic misunderstandings and contrived persecutions at school that recur so monotonously in the girls' weekly stories with more modern settings. The Dulcie referred to in the title is a country girl who suffers the snubs of her more sophisticated classmates and teacher at school in a nearby town without complaint, even when the short-tempered teacher makes the absurd demand that the supposedly slow-witted Dulcie wear a dunce's cap at all times, even at home. Dulcie is not only docile enought to obey this essentially unenforceable order—she is also so suicidally self-sacrificing that she climbs the perilously high steeple of the village church in order to conceal the damage to its partically crumbled tip with her identically-shaped dunce's hat, all so the vicar can make a good impression on a visiting bishop. Not content with this, Dulcie deliberately goes out of her way to conceal the fact that she is responsible for the steeple's miraculous "restoration," even though this means that she must wait until after dark to ensure that she is unobserved repeating the dangerous climb in order to retrieve the cap in time for school the next day. Because she has spent the entire weekend on these altruistic antics (which culminate in her accidentally being locked in the church overnight), and on cooking her dad's Sunday dinner, Dulcie ends up in further disgrace at school, since she is too humble and modest to even consider offering what is admittedly the world's most unlikely excuse for not having done one's homework.

But if you think these stories are ridiculous, just wait until you read about the ones that supposedly take place in the Britain of the present day—the topic of my column for next issue.


WHAT DO THESE NAMES
ALL
HAVE IN COMMON?
A for Andromeda The Abominable Dr. Phibes Alice in Wonderland The Avengers
Roy Ward Baker Tom Baker John Barry Frank Bellamy Honor Blackman Blake's 7
Walter R. Booth Les Bowie Captain Canuck Cerebus the Aardvark The Champions
A Christmas Carol Arthur C. Clarke Brian Clemens Susan Cooper Hazel Court
Peter Cushing Ronald Dahl Dan Dare The Day of the Triffids Dead of Night
Terrance Dicks Dr Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde Doctor Who Dracula Lord Dunsany
Peter Ellenshaw Lionel Fanthorpe Terence Fisher Ian Fleming Flook Bryan Forbes
Four D. Jones Frankenstein Stuart Freeborn Fu Manchu Garth The Goodies
Gorgo Michael Gough Gulliver Hammer Films William Hartnell Jeff Hawke
Lionel Jeffries Judge Dredd Nigel Kneale Christopher Lee Brian Lewis Herbert Lom
George MacDonald Malcolm McDowell Mabinogion The Man in the White Suit
The Man Who was Thursday Marvelman Mary Poppins A Matter of Life and Death
Lois Maxwell Merlin Metal Mickey A Midsummer's Night's Dream Modesty Blaise
Monty Python's Flying Circus Michael Moorcock The Mouse that Roared
The Muppet Show The Narnian Chronicles Terry Nation Edith Nesbit New Worlds
The Once and Future King Out of this World Jon Pertwee Peter Pan Stanley Pitt
Donald Pleasence The Pobble Who Had No Toes The Protectors David Prowse
Quatermass Arthur Rackham Oliver Reed The Rocky Horror Show Nicholas Roeg
Ruddigore Jimmy Sangster Sapphire and Steel Scarth The Sorcerer Peter Sellers
Space 1999 Star Maidens Vargo Statten Barbara Steele Steeleye Span The Survivors
Sylvie and Bruno Tales of the Unexpected Terry-Thomas Thomas the Rhymer
Thunderbirds J.R.R. Tolkien Patrick Troughton E.C. Tubb UFO Edgar Wallace
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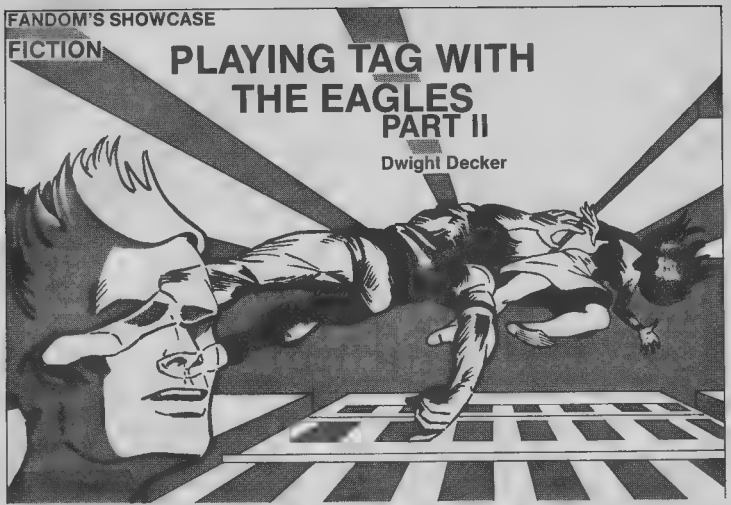
FICTION

PLAYING TAG WITH THE EAGLES PART II

Dwight Decker



SYNOPSIS OF PART I

WOLFGANG FLETCHER is guest of honor at a party sponsored by the Rhea Foundation, but he is hardily in any mood to enjoy it. Born unable to fly in a world where virtually everyone else can fly, his 24 years have been a life of hardship and disadvantage. At least they were until he joined the Rhea Foundation, an organization established to advance the interests of the non-flying minority. Here he found a place and a girl: **TANYA O'CONNOR**. Tanya suspects something is wrong, however, and not without reason. Something strange and unprecedented happened to Wolf when he went to the planet Jagannath with his alien childhood friend, a Diplomat-Class Packrat named **TURNER**

Ever since getting back from Jagannath, Wolf has been able to fly.

Relations between flyers and "ostriches" are strained: Wolf has not told anyone he can fly now for fear of losing Tanya — and the regional chapter of the Rhea Foundation has elected him its president. But matters may be forcing his hand.

Standing at the edge of the deck of Sky Haven, the floating resort hotel two kilometers above the ground, Wolf has been staring off into the night and gloomily pondering his lot. The human race was given the gift of flight 150 years before as a result of a deal made between aliens and a Terrestrial comic book fan, but the why and how remain cloaked in mystery . . . except for Wolf. As a result of his trip to Jagannath, he knows the answers to questions that have bedeviled the human race for a century and a half . . . but can he tell anyone without destroying his comfortable life?

As Part II opens, Wolf has just talked to **SIGNY DARGUAD**, a flying woman he could have perhaps loved if there had not been such a drastic difference between them, and has now let his mind drift back to a trade conference he attended on Jagannath . . .

PART II

The conference was as successful as conferences ever are, but for Wolf the highlight was seeing Turner again and renewing the old friendship. Much had happened in both their lives since they had gone their separate ways, but the old respect and affection for each other had endured. In the evenings, after the days' rounds of talks and contract sessions were done, Turner and Wolf went out together and saw Jagannath.

The planet was uninhabited except for the main interstellar trading colony and vacation resorts in the equatorial regions. Jagannath lay at a three-dimensional crossroads and was ideally suited for goods transshipment and entertaining wealthier tourists But even if it had no native population now, such was not always the case.

In terms of cosmic time, the civilizations of Earth and Packrat Homeworld just missed that of Jagannath. But as living beings measure time, four million years is well on the road to eternity When the civilization of Jagannath was at its height, men were more ape than human and the ancestors of the Packrats were still undifferentiated treedwellers. Now nothing was left of the Jagannathans and their works except for a few enigmatic ruins on Jagannath and planets in nearby star systems The Jagannathans had probably never visited Earth, but if they had, the

tall, reed-slender, not-quite-humanoids could have inspired the dimly-remembered and confused legends of gods and elves that have haunted the human psyche ever since. Xeno-archaeologists from Earth and other worlds were troubled by the evidence that the Jagannathans had apparently vanished when their civilization was in full bloom, with no hint of war or plague. One day four million years before, the Jagannathans simply weren't there anymore, leaving their empty cities to crumble peacefully under the onslaught of year after endless year of weather and unchecked jungle. How could a cultured, technologically able race suddenly disappear? **Why** would it? It was a mystery as unexplained as the disappearances of the Mayans and the dinosaurs had once been, one more mystery of space to add to all the others.

The day before Wolf's return home was entirely free of meetings, and Turner rented a medium-range aircar for an outing into the countryside. The Packrat was strangely silent during the long flight over the unbroken kilometers of crimson jungle below, seeming to have something unduly weighty on his mind. Wolf merely assumed he was down at heart because the conference was over and he would shortly have to leave his friend, although Turner had said he would probably soon be posted to the Packrat trading offices on Earth. Presently a massive vine-covered rock formation reared out of the foliage ahead, towering over the treetops and everything else for kilometers around. "Your archaeologists have named this the Cathedral of Jhelum," Turner explained, and Wolf realized that the rock formation was actually the ruin of a colossal building that dwarfed any of the Pyramids. " However," Turner went on, "the name is anything but literal, for no one knows what its purpose actually was. I thought it might be something of interest to see on this our last day here."

Turner landed the aircar in a cleared area where successive teams of archaeologists had set up base camps in times past. The site was deserted now, but as he got out of the aircar Wolf had the sudden feeling that he and Turner were not alone. Oddly, it was a sensation more comforting than disturbing

Four million years of erosion and decay had left their mark on the Cathedral even though it had been built to stand the ages. It was now barely more than a lumpy mountain honeycombed with caves and tunnels, many of which had stalactites and stalagmites. Turner thought it fascinating to poke around with a handlight, but tramping through the endless dusty corridors left Wolf less than enthused. And he soon discovered that his first impression had been correct: he and Turner were **not** alone. They were being followed by several small, fuzzy patches of pale blue light. The lights maintained a respectful distance, never catching up but never falling behind. Wolf asked Turner wha they were.

Turner barely turned to look at them. "Some sort of Jagannathan firefly, it is my guess," he said, and seemed to lose interest in the matter.

That answer didn't satisfy Wolf, since while there was obviously fire, there was no fly to go along with it. When Wolf walked back to take a closer look at the lights, they retreated in turn. The lights were not overtly hostile, just shy. Wolf gave up trying to find out what they were and followed after Turner

Eventually they came out into the Cathedral's hollow core, a titanic chamber some playful archaeologist had nicknamed "Erich von Daniken's Living Room" after a XX-Century pseudo-scientist who doted on such things. Their handlights probed the darkness and found only dusty emptiness and flying, squeaking animals that approximated bats in the Jagannathan evolutionary scheme. The blue lights followed at their usual distance.

"Take caution," warned Turner. "There is a dropping off just before you."

Wolf found it by almost stepping over the edge. Shaken, he tried to plumb the depths with his handlight and saw only a yawning pit below. If Erich von Daniken's living room had a floor, it was lost in the blackness beyond the range of the handlight beam. The rough, time-etched walls of the pit sloped outward somewhat and were broken by ledges, niches, and what may have been badly corroded ornamentation or carvings.

"Your archaeologists have thoroughly explored this vast hall," Turner remarked, "for they can fly and such unfathomable emptiness holds no terrors for them. But I find it interesting to see it for myself and on my own terms even as a groundling. Don't you agree, my cub-friend?"

"It certainly **is** impressive . . . " Wolf said, turning his handlight in this direction and that, still trying to get some sense of the unimaginably enormous room's scale. In the darkness he forgot just how close he was standing to the brink of a precipice one foot slipped past the edge into nothing He yelled in alarm and tried to scramble back to solid footing. As he flailed, his handlight flew from his hand and plummetted spinning into the abyss. His center of gravity was too far off-center to recover — he clawed frantically at the air but toppled sideways into the pit.

His fingers raked the ragged, stony walls as he slid down, and he didn't fall very far. His feet met a ledge some three or four meters down and he came to an abrupt stop. His fingers, scraped raw and bloody by the abrasion, dug into what little roughnesses and protrusions in the wall they could find for support. Because of the slope, he was leaning slightly forward, which helped. The ledge was narrow, barely wide enough to accommodate much of his feet past his toes, but it felt substantial enough to hold him for a while -- if he didn't have a heart attack first, anyway. His breath came in short little gasps, his stomach was a heavy bag of rocks at the pit of his abdomen, and he could feel his heart banging against his ribcage. "Turner . . . !" he choked. "Help me!"

Turner's light beam found him from above. "Wolf, you are all right!" The Packrat breathed a quick prayer in his own language, basically giving thanks to the Kingfather of Kingfathers and Queenmother of Queenmothers that Wolf wasn't in any worse shape than he was. "Hang on tightly: I shall come down for you." Hooking his handlight to his belt, Turner kicked off his boots, dropped to his hands and feet, and clambered over the edge of the pit. He scaled down the wall face with astonishing ease, finding toe and handholds where none could have possibly existed, and demonstrating that Packrats had lost very little of the arboreal heritage. The blue lights had moved in closer and hovered directly overhead, seemingly observing the operation with intense interest.

Just as Wolf's aching, abused fingers were about to give way, Turner wrapped an arm around his waist. "Rest easily, my friend; I am returning you to safety " But to do it,

he had to support Wolf with one arm, leaving only three limbs to carry their combined weight. Wolf tried to help by finding hand and toe holds of his own, but lacked Turner's natural climbing ability and kept slipping back. Finally, after what seemed like hours of painful inching their way back up, they reached the level of the floor. The floor was smooth enough that there was almost nothing for Wolf to hang on to while he pulled himself up and over the edge. Clinging to the wall surface, Turner pushed Wolf up, the idea being that once Wolf was safely topside he would pull Turner up as well

It didn't work that way Just as Wolf was on firm ground again, Turner, dangerously off-balance and losing his grip in his effort to push Wolf upwards, lost his hold entirely. With a deep, throaty Packrat scream, Turner fell backwards. Wolf spun around on his hands and knees and watched in sick horror as the handlight on Turner's belt dropped like a dying comet into the black depths. Then, suddenly, it stopped. It continued to shine, a tiny, distant speck of light. It did not move.

Even though Jagannath's gravity was about 95% of Earth's and Turner didn't have a defense field, he was not necessarily dead. Packrats had evolved tough. But he could be seriously injured.

Exhausted from the climb, almost to tired to move from where he lay, Wolf felt more helpless than he had even felt before. Even when the neighborhood rowdies had marooned him on the Hypercom Tower he had not been worried about whether he would be rescued; the only question had been **when** someone would come by. Here, deep inside a labyrinthine tomb somewhere in the continent-sized jungles of an all but uninhabited planet, there was no hope of anyone coming by in any reasonable amount of time As far as he knew, Turner had not told anyone where they were going, and his wristcom signal couldn't penetrate the layers of rocklike walls between him and the open air even if anyone were in range to receive it. Whether he could make his way to the outside, feeling his way through the tangle of half-blocked corridors in utter darkness, he wasn't sure and didn't even want to try He lay there gasping and heaving, and into his despondency filtered a tinge of guilt: of all the people on Earth, Turner had to make friends with the one man who couldn't help him in a crisis like this

The blue lights hovered placidly overhead

After a moment, Wolf realized that the lights were talking among themselves Not in words but in concepts much subtler. To his growing amazement, he began to understand what they were saying

Here is one who does not share in the destiny of his kind. He has had to walk upon the ground while his fellows have had the freedom of the sky.

He has borne his affliction with humor and courage, but now he has reached his limits and can go no further.

The fault is ours, for his web of flight lies dead and inert within him.

"Wait a minute!" Wolf choked, hardly daring believe what he was hearing. "Just who — or **what** — are you?"

The reply was one of gentle, sympathetic amusement Wolf had the uncanny feeling that a god smoothing the ruffled feathers of a sparrow fallen fromits nest would have chuckled injust that tone.

Perhaps we should ask you who or what you are the one who has come unbidden into our home, not the reverse.

"You can't be the people who built this place!" Wolf protested. "They were flesh and blood and you're just . . lights."

We are minds. We have long since left our bodies behind. This entire universe is but a tiny island in an infinite sea, and when we discovered the means to do so, we left it. But this universe, this world, is our birthplace. It was our home, it was where we spent our youth. Some of us occasionally return to it.

With that simple statement, the mystery of what happened to the Jagannathans were solved A dedicated archaeologist would have considered finding out worth any number of Packrats, but Wolf lacked the proper scientific detachment. "Look," he said, "I'd love to stay here and talk about the wonders of the universe, but my friend is down there at the bottom and I don't know if he's dead or badly hurt or what Can you help him?"

The lights glowed quietly. **Perhaps we can help him by helping you.**

"How's that?"

This was once our universe, and it is glorious. It is our desire that those who live in it be worthy of that glory. It pleased us to select the most promising of the new races that have evolved since we left and offer it its dream. Yours is a young race with exceedingly simple desires: the basic comforts and pleasures of the lesser animals from which you come. But one of you had a splendid dream, a magnificent dream. In that dream he articulated the drive and the spirit that lifted your people out of savagery. Nor was it his dream alone, for the popular mythology from which he derived it was an expression of the unconscious yearnings of your people. We made that dream real for him and his kind. Perhaps there was a flaw in our design, for a tiny percentage of the webs of flight replicate wrongly and are stillborn. That flaw can be corrected. We can make the dream real for you.

Wolf needed a few seconds to grasp the enormity of what he had just been told. "You give me thepower to fly?" He thought of Turner — and of Tanya. "I . . I don't know. I've come to terms with having to walk. I've learned to accept it. I'm comfortable."

The blue lights were no longer amused. **You would crawl when you could walk? You would walk — when your destiny is to fly?**

"Destiny? I didn't ask for any destiny!"

Destiny is not something to be chosen. It chooses you — and either you rise to meet it and be worthy of it . . . or you deny it, renounce it, and let the light in your soul go

out. You have no choice! Yours shall be, must be the destiny of your kind!

The blue lights closed in on Wolf. "Wait — no!" he blurted, weakly waving his arm to fend them off.

"No! I won't let you — !"

The blue lights ignored his pleas. They settled all over his body and . . . **entered** it. They wrapped around his nerves and agonizing electric pain ripped through him. He jerked convulsively, uncontrollably, screaming. A pulsating blue glare bathed him and the air crackled, heavy with the thunderstorm smell of ozone. The pain increased and Wolf screamed again and again, louder and louder.

Then it stopped. Everything stopped.

Gasping for breath, Wolf slowly realized that the pain was gone. The dusty floor was cold and damp under his face and arms, and he felt strangely lightheaded.

Most of the blue lights were gone, but one remained. Its tone was that of Zeus passing sentence after hurtling a thunderbolt, but it was not unkind. **We have almost forgotten what it means to have a healthy, capable body, and to be a part of physical reality, but the path we took is now not to be changed and not to be regretted. It may be a path from which you have been diverted, for with the power of flight you are now more fully one with the natural order. You exult in the power of your body to fly, and you are thereby made whole. It is our gift to you, a token of good will from one race of intelligent beings to another. Use it and enjoy it well, with the knowledge that an older and wiser race looks upon you with a faint trace of wistful envy. For you are free and innocent.**

Then the blue light, the last of the Jagannathans, were gone.

Wolf groaned weakly. He was shaken — he wanted to shout profanity until the walls echoed, but nothing in the terrestrial lexicon was strong enough and the more lurid Packrat expressions he knew were too ludicrously species — particular to be satisfying. Instead, he tried sitting up. Just the muscular effort of his arm raising his torso off the floor was enough to propel his entire body into the air. Frightened, he tensed his muscles and he stopped, hanging in nothing a meter above the floor. He not only felt lightheaded, he felt no weight at all.

"Oh Christ . . . !" he muttered, mild blasphemy the best he could manage. The Jagannathans had somehow activated his inert flying web. He could fly. He had been thrown bodily across the chasm separating one kind of humanity from another and there was no going back. He had the power now and there was no way to permanently undo it.

But he had no real control over it yet. His muscles were untrained and at first he could only flounder helplessly in mid-air. After a few minutes, he was able to swim back down to the floor. Holding on to the projections on the face of the wall, he pushed himself down into the abyss of Erich von Daniken's living room. Turner's handlight still shone below, still distant, still unmoving. Wolf grimly reflected on the irony that while hardly half an hour before his greatest worry had been the risk of falling, now his problem was getting down at all.

Eventually he reached the bottom and his shoes pressed lightly into the dirt, litter, and accumulated Jagannathan bat-droppings of four million years. He found Turner: unconscious, but alive and seemingly

whole. His fall had been cushioned by the soft, springy guano, although a human probably wouldn't have come through it as well.

Wolf picked Turner up as best he could, with the Packrat more or less draped over one shoulder so he could have a hand free for the handlight, and leaped. His muscles had to expend double effort to lift Turner's inert body, but he slowly rose.

The nightmare wasn't over yet. He still had to get out of the Cathedral. he would dream later of the unending dark corridors, of the scuttling things that fled just ahead of his lightbeam, of his unpracticed reflexes betraying him with wrong moves at every turn — he couldn't really fly yet, but he had lost his ability to walk. And having to carry Turner further hampered him, an unwieldy and clumsy burden. When he finally stumbled out of the maze into the sunlit clearing some two hours later, he was almost tearfully happy.

He couldn't fly the aircar, so he had to call for help. While he waited for the rescue party, Turner revived. The Packrat was groggy, in a state analogous to shock and in no shape to pilot the aircar, but he was able to understand what had happened when Wolf briefly summarized it for him.

Turner put his hand in Wolf's. "Thank you," he said in a whisper that was almost a growl. "I saved you and you saved me; thus are we friends. And I am happy that you are now one with your airborne brothers."

Turner never said much about it afterwards, but Wolf had a nagging suspicion that the Packrat had known more about the Jagannathans than he would admit. They had originally arranged for a Packrat trading party to be their agents on Earth, after all, and while the official version was that the Packrats involved had subsequently vanished into deep space without a trace, they must have resumed their normal trading activity later — and one of those Packrats might have talked. Had Turner deliberately set up the Jagannathan trip for Wolf as an attempt to do right by an old friend? It was a puzzle, and Turner would give him no clues to solve it.

Meanwhile, Wolf found that having flight thrust on him when he was an adult instead of having lived with it since birth brought with it any number of adjustment problems. His face turned red and puffy because his bodily fluids, no longer affected by gravity, had redistributed themselves. His appetite doubled and tripled. His bones suffered an alarming loss of calcium. He had to learn to walk all over again.

By the time he got back to Earth, after a two-week trip in space, most of the problems had stabilized — but he ran into a flock of new ones. He had been elected President of the regional chapter of the Rhea Foundation while he was gone, which meant a great deal of work in getting organized; Tanya was pushing strongly for having their relationship legally recognized; and he had to fight it out with himself whether or not to tell anyone what had happened on Jagannath. On the one hand, he wanted nothing more than to resume his old life and try to forget he had the power, but on the other hand he now knew the answers to questions that had nagged the human race for nearly a century and a half. Where, he wondered, did his right to a quiet, comfortable life give way to his responsibility for the rest of humanity?

Wolf compromised. He decided to walk as much as possible and to fly only in emergencies, to live like he always had and tell no one what had happened. But something always seemed to come up in which he had to take to the air, and more and more often, when he felt certain he was unlikely to run into anyone he knew, he found it far easier to fly like everyone else instead of insisting on special treatment for a handicap he no longer had. As time went on, the compromise became increasingly less tenable.

"Oh, there you are!" Tanya called from across the deck. "I've been looking all over for you!"

"I think it is of good time to sample some more of your table of delicacies inside," said Turner, and began moving away. He was, after all, a diplomat born and bred, and knew instinctively when to blend in with the woodwork.

"Bring back a roast beef sandwich," said Wolf. "Better yet, bring back the whole cow." That was hardly an exaggeration: he felt hungry enough to eat it.

As Turner went off, Tanya came up. When she embraced Wolf, she brushed against the loose rope barrier. "Careful," Wolf warned, pulling her away from the edge. "There isn't much of anything between here and the ground."

"I'm all right," Tanya told him. "Heights don't bother me as much as they used to."

They hugged, they kissed, they exchanged comments about what a nice party it was, and then Tanya got down to business.

"I don't know what it is," she said, "but you've changed. You're different somehow."

Wolf felt his empty stomach tighten. He wanted to tell her, he even started to tell her, but the words died in his throat before reachign the open air. "I'm sorry," he finally said. "Maybe I have changed, but if I have, I'm still the same person I was on the inside. I've just had a lot of thinking to do lately."

"Is that why you've been avoiding me ever since you got back from Jagannath?" Tanya demanded. "So you could **think**?"

The conversation went downhill from there. Something about Wolf was setting her on edge — perhaps the way he moved, growing more fluid with time because he could now fly, subconsciously reminded her of the airborne men she hated and feared — and nothing he coud say or do eased her mind. Her feelings were easily hurt and almost anything he said was apt to be taken the wrong way. He hadn't told her he could fly because he didn't want to lose her, but it was beginning to look as though he might very well lose her anyway.

"I just know there's something wrong," she finally said, "but if you don't trust me enough to tell me what it is, well . . . I don't know how much longer we can go on."

"You've got to understand something, Tanya," Wolf said, the words tumbling out in his desperation to get them said. "The universe is a lot bigger place than you and I ever dreamed, and —"

"I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about!" Tanya interrupted, her voice turning cold. "Somewhere inside of you is the Wolf Fletcher I fell in love with, but wherever he is, you've done a superb job of covering him up. I'll talk to you later . . . maybe."

"Tanya, wait!" Wolf called after, but she didn't stop. She walked on across the deck to talk to some people clustered by the railing on the other side.

Why was it just me? Wolf wondered bleakly. Why couldn't the Jagannathans have given flight to **all** of the ostriches?

The party seemed to be moving outside despite the chill wind: more people were wandering out of the ballroom all the time. Wolf would have liked nothing better than to have had more time to think things through, but Abdul Salazar and some of the others from the old gang found him and wanted to talk about the pressing issues of the day.

"Stairways in **all** public places, that's what we need!" Abdul declared. "And places to sit down, and more air-taxis — hell, if there weren't any aliens on Earth, we probably wouldn't have any of the stairs, benches, and taxis we do have!"

"So where's the money going to come from for all this?" Wolf asked. "The government has enough trouble persuading citizens to donate enough money to pay for its normal operating expenses — if people found out their money was going for things to make life easier for **us**, either donations would dry up or we'd all be thrown off the nearest balconies. The government won't help us."

"People used to **have** to donate money to the government . . ." Abdul muttered.

"They used to be drafted into armies and thown into prisons, too," Wolf said, "all because someone could threaten to hurt them. Not any more —"

He was interrupted by a chorus of screams from the other side of the deck. Everyone looked up. The same people that had been standing at the opposite edge of the deck were still there, but they were standing at the rope, looking over the side, and shouting. Through their screams, one fact suddenly became starkly clear —

"**Tanya fell over**!"

Wolf looked wildly around. Everyone was shocked, paralyzed — no one was doing anything, no one **could** do anything. He saw Turner, frozen in mid-step coming across the deck, a sandwich for Wolf still in his hand. Their eyes met. **Well, Wolf**, Turner's expression seemed to say, **what are you going to do now**?

There was only one thing he could do, and he would have to do it right out in front of everyone. Wolf spun on his heel and started to vault over the rope.

Abdul Salazar grabbed him, holding him back. "Don't do it, Wolf!" he yelled. "You can't help her now!"

Wolf fought to break free — with every passing second, tanya hurtled that much closer to the ground.

Suddenly a voice called out from overhead. "I'll get her!" It was Signy, a human arrow shooting down past the deck with a shriek of ruptured air and a jetstream of glowing blue.

Wolf sagged in relief. Signy must have been hovering nearby for some time — why, he didn't know — and she'd save Tanya. His secret was safe for however much longer he could keep it.

Behind him, Abdul let out a long sigh. "Tanya had Traders' luck tonight for cert — that flyer'll catch her!"

Catch her? Somewhere deep inside Wolf's skull, a warning light flashed on.

"**Signy** — **no**!" he yelled, tearing away from Abdul's relaxed grip and leaping over the side.

The screams of the onlookers were lost behind him as he plummetted into the darkness below.

Signy was already far down, a pale blue splotch shrinking into the distance, and Tanya was somewhere beyond that. Wolf stretched out his arms and strained his muscles into the direction of his fall — electricity coursed through his nerves, the defense field around him burned blue, and the wind howled as he knifed into it. Throwing all his strength into accelerating, Wolf hoped desperately to reach Tanya before Signy did. She had been flying all her life, but he was stronger and faster . . . he hoped.

The law of physics that states that a falling body in Earth's gravity accelerates at a constant rate of about 10 meters second works fine in a vacuum, but in an atmosphere per air resistance slows it down: a falling human being hits a top speed somewhere between 150 and 200 kilometers per hour, certainly enough to kill anyone striking the ground at that rate but slow enough that cases were on record of people in the pre-personal flight era who had fallen out of airplanes into treetops or snowdrifts and survived. Signy knew nothing about what it meant to fall and Wolf knew only too much. There lay the risk and the hope.

Wolf threw himself all the harder into the dive: his face was a mask of stone, a tight mass of rigid muscle set against the thickly resisting air. He tore into the empty deep a flaming blue meteor, knowing that one way or another, his life would never be the same again: all the years to come, all the days that he had yet to live, depended entirely on what he did in the next minute.

The faint blue spark that was Signy expanded as Wolf overtook her. Tanya was a tiny flailing silhouette against the lights of a small duster of agricultural buildings on the ground, and Signy had almost caught up with her.

There was no time for anything but brute force. Calling up every last reserve of energy he had, Wolf increased the forward strain on his muscles to their excruciatingly painful limit, and sped up even more.

Signy had just about reached Tanya. She was stretching out her arms to grab her.

Then Wolf slammed into Signy.

Defense fields flared with a blinding blue flash. Wolf was thrown one way, Signy another. She cried out in astonishment as she tumbled through the air. Tanya kept on dropping helplessly. The grounds was coming up fast.

Protected from the impact by the defense field and unhurt, Wolf quickly recovered his equilibrium and swooped down after Tanya. Matching speeds, he moved in just above her and gently wrapped his arms around her waist. She was limp in his hold, unconscious but alive. At least she hadn't had a heart attack from fright. **Thank the Queenmother of Queenmothers**! Wolf thought in triumph, not realizing he had used a Packrat prayer. With Tanya securely in his arms, he began to slowly decelerate.

Signy moved in alongside, more than ever a mermaid of the air with her blonde hair flowing back in the windstream. She recognized Wolf in the starlight and the dim illumination from the ground lights perilously close below, and her expression combined puzzlement and wonder. "I didn't know you could fly!" she shouted, her voice almost lost in the rush of air.

"I couldn't — until recently!" Wolf shouted back.

"I thought not flying was . . . permanent," Signy began, then realized she was looking at proof it wasn't. "But why did you hit me?"

"Because you were going to **catch** Tanya," Wolf told her.

"So? I wanted to save her life —"

"You would have **killed** her!" Wolf snapped back with a vehemence that brought Signy up short and surprised even him. Well, he'd been nearly killed that way himself more than once by well-meaning flyers. His slow descent eased to a stop, barely more than 50 meters above the ground. He started upwards once again, Tanya well in hand, slowly at first and gradually gaining speed. Signy paced him a meter or so alongside and he explained the facts of life under gravity to her. "You've spent all your life flying: you don't really understand things like gravity and inertia. Catching somebody in mid-air after she's fallen for hundreds of meters — bringing her to a sudden stop — is the same thing as letting her hit the ground. Tanya would have died right in your arms."

Signy was horrified. "I — I didn't know!"

Wolf's tone softened. "Well, at least you **tried** to help. That's more than a lot of fliers might have done."

"When I saw Tanya go over the side, it just seemed like I ought to do something. She means a lot to you."

Before Wolf could ask how it happened that Signy was there to see it at all, he felt Tanya stirring. She groaned weakly and her eyelids fluttered open. It took her a moment to take in the situation and Wolf felt her body tense against his.

"Don't worry," Wolf said. "I've got you."

He could feel her astonishment at the sound of his voice. She turned her head an looked up into his face, and slowly the dawn broke. "**You've** got me? Who's got y — oh, never mind! You lied to me. You can fly." With that she settled unhappily in Wolf's embrace and said nothing more.

Wolf continued the upward flight towards the brilliant lights of Sky Haven far overhead, and wondered what Tanya was thinking, but decided that it was probably just as well that he couldn't read her mind.

Three months later, after the first blaze of publicity had died down a little, Abdul Salazar sat in the sunlight on a newly-installed park bench and draped his arm loosely around Tanya's neck and shoulders.

"It's amazing," he told Wolf, hovering at his ease in the air just in front of him. "I think you you've done more for the Rhea Foundation **out** of it than you ever could have don **in** it."

Wolf shrugged. "Well, I had the whole human race's attention there for a while when I announced the Jagannathan business — **why** we can fly — and I thought I'd better put in a word for you guys, even if the Exex Board did decide I had to resign. I was a flightless bird for over 20 years, after all. Everything else came from private contributions. Of course, I may have helped **end** the Rhea

Foundation if the pilgrimages to Jagannath keep up."

"That's only if the Jagannathans cooperate," Tanya put in, "and so far only about three Rheans out of the 50 or so who've gone there have found any. Me, I think I'll stay an ostrich."

"Me too," Abdul grinned, and hugged Tanya.

Wolf stretched lazily. "It's getting late and Signy and I are supposed to meet at Turner's for dinner, so —"

"Signy's a lucky woman," said Tanya with a trace of wistfulness.

"She wasn't just lucky — she had help from a few specks of light on Jagannath," Wolf said. "She says she always felt attracted to me — 'my courage in the face of adversity' or something like that — and that was even why she was hanging around in the background at the party the night you took one step too many —"

"I was upset," said Tanya. "I wasn't watching where I was going."

"Anyway," Wolf went on, "the gulf between us was too great to do anything about until the Jagannathans stepped in. But now . . . well, we'll probably have our own little squadron of flying Fletchers before too long."

"I'm happy for you," Tanya told him — and she meant it.

"Thanks," Wolf said and, waving farewell, launched himself into the endless blue of the open sky. He recalled an old man's words, spoken months before and reflected that like the rest of humanity, he could now play tag with the eagles.

END

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